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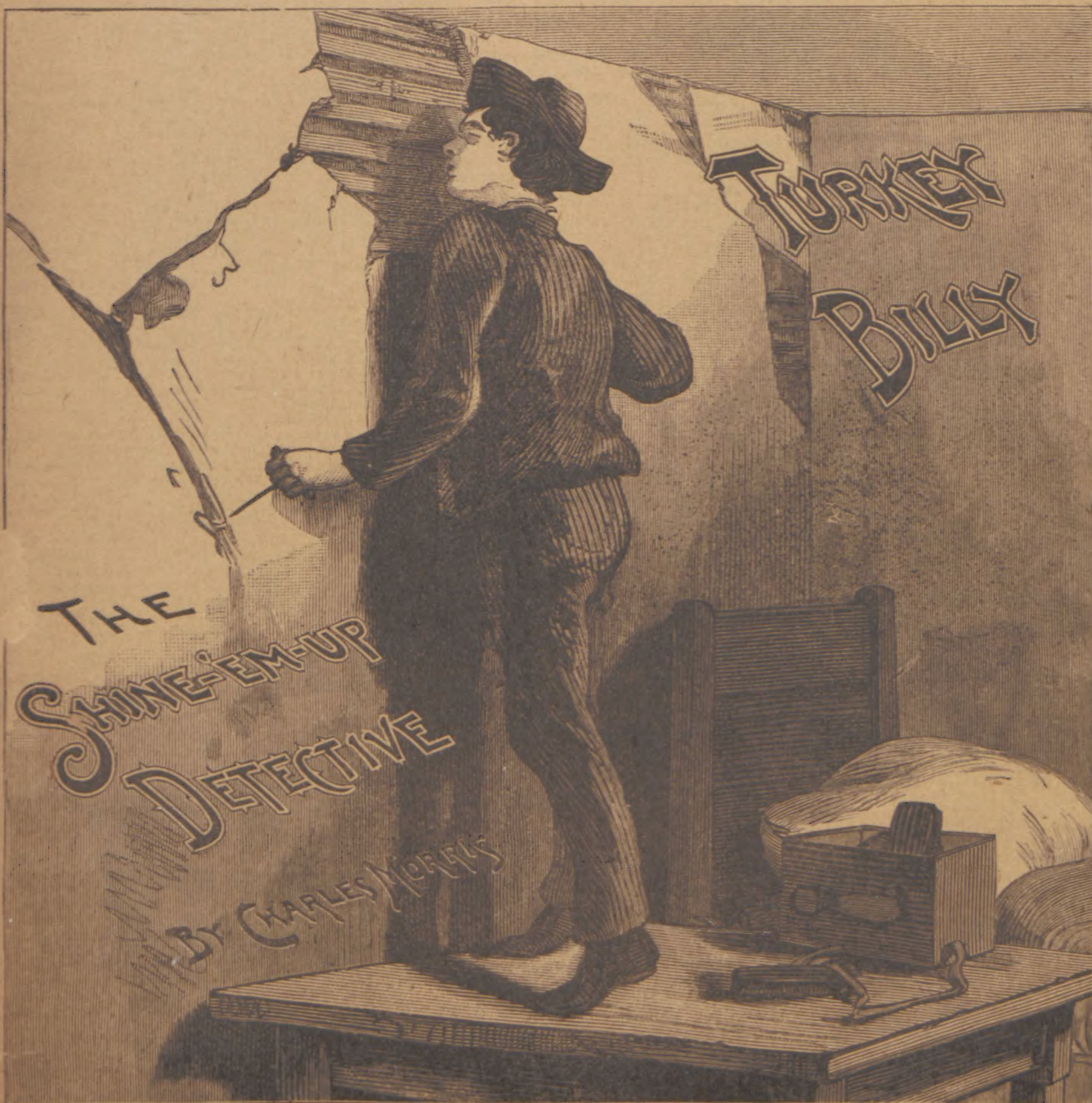
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"I'VE GOT JERRY JENKINS, PROFESSIONAL CROOK, UNDER MY EYE NOW, YOU BET!" EXCLAIMED TURKEY BILLY.

Turkey Billy,

The Shine-'em-up Detective.

OR,
THE GAMIN GUARDIAN.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

CHAPTER I. LOVERS IN DANGER.

"YOUR turn next, sir. Haven't got my card-case with me, but my name's Billy Turk, otherwise Turkey Billy, and if you want any recommendation just ask the President. I gave him a jolly shine the last time he was in New York."

These words were spoken by a bright-faced boy, whose "stamping-ground" was in and around Madison Avenue Square, New York City, and whose sparkling eyes and generally wide-awake air told that he was quite able to carry his end of the weight of the world. The box at his feet and the brush in his hand were evidence enough of his profession.

The person he addressed was a well-dressed and good-looking young man. Beside him walked a young lady, of beautiful face and attractive figure, and with eyes that seemed to say that she and her companion were more than mere friends. It would have needed little skill in human nature, to pronounce them lovers, at sight.

"Not now, my lad. I'll see you later," answered the gentleman, with a smile. "I have no time just now to hunt up the President."

"Just wait then. I'll call Mr. Vanderbilt. There he goes. I always do his shinin'. If you don't say his shoes are better than two lookin'-glasses I'll trade my box to a tin peddler."

"Oh! don't bother me," replied the gentleman, impatiently. "Some other time."

"I see how it is," cried the boy with a sly wink. "You don't want to comb your hair by Vanderbilt's shoes, when you've got a couple of bright eyes like them to look into."

The lady looked away with a bright blush. But, there was a laugh on her lips when she turned back.

"Compliments are not in fashion, my boy," she said lightly. "You will have to try some other trick of trade."

"Compliments!" cried Billy, with an air of surprise. "And a pair of eyes like them! And such rosy cheeks and red lips! Why, there aren't words enough in the Dictionary to compliment them! Every word I said was gospel. Now, sir, just hoist up your canal-boats on this box, and I'll give you a shine in the kick of a min."

"You don't mean that for a compliment, I hope," laughed the gentleman.

"That's as you choose to take it. I didn't say mud-scoops. It isn't always polite to come out with the plain truth, you know. Lift them up, now!"

"I am getting the cream of this business, Harry," laughed the lady. "You had better take a shine. That's the best you can hope for."

"It seems so," he answered with a rueful air. "He hasn't even a word to say for the handsome shape of my nose, nor the beauty of my finger-nails. Well, there's only one way to get rid of Master Impudence."

He lifted his foot to the box. Billy seized upon it, and briskly opened operations with his brushes. The young street scout had been shrewd enough to know where his praise would pay best.

"I reckon you two are spoonin'," he said, when he had his customer's foot safe captive. "Sparkin', I mean. Settin' up o' nights, an' moonin' under the willow-trees."

The lady turned with an impatient jerk, and walked away.

"Pshaw!" cried the gentleman. "It is about time you were learning to mind your own business, boy."

"I reckon there isn't any bootblack in York that can discount me at my business," answered Billy proudly. "There ain't a lord comes over from England but I get his jobs."

"Indeed! And what lord did you shine up last?"

"The Lord knows who!"

"You're a smart young man."

"You bet I am! Just as smart as they make them. Come, rig up your derrick and hoist t'other canal-boat."

"Harry," laughed the lady, who had returned. "This boy is much too wide-awake to waste his

talents in this business. You said you needed a smart boy in your office. He might answer."

Billy had evidently got on the right side of the young lady, in spite of her assumed dislike of compliments.

"I'm the chap for your money!" cried Billy enthusiastically. "I'm getting too old for this trade, and wouldn't mind being cashier of a bank or treasurer of a gold-mine or something."

"Well, you're modest, at any rate. Can you read and write?"

"You ought to see me sling ink! And I can 'most read Latin. I could rattle it off like English if the words weren't so full of busses!"

"If they were just like English, eh? Can you cipher?"

"Can I cipher? Fork over your cash for that job and see if I don't give you the right change out of an X."

"I have no time to talk with you now. Here is your money, and here is my card. Come to my office to-morrow afternoon and I will see what you are good for."

"Good for! I'm good for wheat, you bet!" rejoined Billy, as he replaced the brushes in his box. "But I know how it is. Been there myself. I'm sparkin' a little gal down our way. She's scrumptious too, I tell you!"

"Then I ain't scrumptious," laughed the lady.

"Oh, you get out! Take him away, and don't let him stumble over no stones takin' your eyes for diamonds."

"Nelly," said the gentleman, "this young man has first-class taste. Suppose we sit down and—"

"I have had enough of his taste," she replied, tossing her head roguishly.

"I see; 'cause I've nothin' to say for Mr. Harry," rejoined the bootblack. "He'll do. I reckon he'd pass in a crowd if it was big enough. Good-by! I'll toddle down to-morrow. And I want an invite to the wedding, mind that."

Tossing his box over his shoulder, Turkey Billy walked off, leaving a warm blush on the lady's cheek and a look of hopeful desire in the gentleman's eyes.

"Nelly," he whispered, seizing and pressing her hand, "if even the bootblacks can see our love, it is time we were taking this sharp boy's suggestion. When shall it be, love?"

"You have had my answer already on that," she replied, walking away with an air of displeasure. "Why will you make me repeat it?"

He followed somewhat sheepishly. Evidently, for some reason or other, the course of their true love had not run smooth.

They had hardly disappeared from the scene, before Billy was back again, and now dodging behind a tree, he looked after them with a sly smile on his intelligent face.

"I didn't plaster it on half thick enough," he muttered. "Sugar-house molasses isn't nothin' alongside of their sweetness. If there were any bees about, the whole hive would settle down on them for honey. They're just the jolliest pair of spoons that ever eat their taffy off of one stick."

Further comments from the fun-loving boy were prevented by the entrance of two other persons upon the scene.

One of these was a tall, slender, well-dressed man, with thin lips and sharp nose. There was a sinister expression in his eyes as he looked after the pair of lovers.

His companion was marked by a rough dress, which had some pretense to smartness, and an unpleasant face on which the word villain seemed written in plain accents.

They gazed cautiously around them. The coast seemed clear. Billy had suddenly shrunk from sight, wholly behind the tree, observing the peculiar aspect of these new-comers, whom his quick senses had "spotted" as suspicious characters.

"You see them!" remarked the gentleman, pointing to the lovers, who were, of course, unconscious of this espionage.

"I mought, if I'd brung my double-barreled telescopes," growled the other. "I kin jist 'bout make 'em out with a pair of or'nary eyes."

"Suppose you save your smartness, Jenkins, for somebody that will appreciate it," rejoined the other in a tone of anger. "Listen to me, now. You see that pair?"

"Them softies! Why, she's tuk his arm. Reckon they'll be kissin' next, right out o' doors." Jenkins spat on the ground as if he had an unpleasant taste in his mouth.

"I want you to follow them. See where they go and what they do. Don't be too sure that they are lovers. It is not unusual for a lady to take a gentleman's arm. If you can find any sure proof that they are lovers bring word to

me. You understand? Well, go now. Don't lose sight of them."

Jenkins slouched on without answer. There was something very sneaking in his manner as he followed the unconscious pair in advance.

Billy, who was now peeping curiously from his post, saw the look of spite upon the face of the man. His hands were clinched, and he stamped violently upon the ground.

"I will have her!" he hissed. "I feared something like this, but I had no evidence before. So, Harry Weston is the favored one! That I did not dream of. He shall not stand in my path," he continued with almost fierce decision. "I will ruin him before he shall rob me of that girl. She is the only woman I ever loved, and I fear she despises me. But, she shall be mine, she shall be mine! Harry Weston, wise as you deem yourself, you do not know the danger you are in!"

He shook his fist with an aspect of rage after the lovers as he turned and walked angrily away, gnawing his lips with spite as he did so.

He had but fairly gone when Billy emerged from behind his tree, placed his box on end, on the ground, seated himself upon it, and dropped his chin on his two palms.

"Well!" he broke out. "Here's riches! This is sugar in my coffee, isn't it! And butter on my bread, too, I reckon."

He looked first to the right and then to the left. Both parties were still in sight. The last speaker was moving slowly and moodily away as if buried in deep thought.

Billy sprung to his feet, folded his arms, and began to stride with a theatrical tread up and down the pavement, while his brows were drawn down in high-tragedy fashion.

"Harry Weston!—villain!—you've robbed me of my sweetheart!" he ejaculated in his deepest tones. "Your dog's dead! Your goose's cooked! She shall be mine—mine—mine! or I'll tear a board off the cow-shed. Vil-la-in! Be-ware!" and Turkey Billy stamped his foot and wrinkled his brows with the air of an Edwin Forrest.

The next moment, however, a new fancy seemed to strike him. He flung his cap into the air, burst into a fit of laughter, and broke into a lively dance.

"This is jolly, rich and gay, and I'm going to see it through," he declared. "Which shall I take after?" he continued, following the different parties with his eyes. "The last one, I reckon. I know where to find Harry Weston. This chap is my game now. If I don't nail him I'll sell out and gobble-gobble-gobble fer a Dime Museum freak."

He grasped his box and ran after the vanishing stranger. But he did not succeed in nailing him as he had threatened. The gentleman had reached a station of the Elevated, and before Billy could get up the stairs and gain the platform, his quarry was flying away on a train which he had just been in time to catch.

"Sold!" cried the boy, seating himself on his box, with a rueful look. "Dished this time. But, I'll come out right side up yet! If I don't you can take my commission away as bootblack extraordinary to the President!"

CHAPTER II.

TURKEY BILLY'S NEW SITUATION.

ON the morning of the second day after that of the scene just described, Turkey Billy might have been seen, with box on shoulder and a highly independent air upon his face, lounging along the down-town streets of New York.

As he passed on his way he looked carefully at the numbers over the doors, as if in search of some particular locality.

"Number 125. Edward Morton, Commission Merchant. I reckon that's the shanty. I'll just toddle in without knockin', and see if the folks of the house are at home."

The observing lad passed into the wide hall, lined on each side with offices. On one door was inscribed the name "Edward Morton." Billy at once opened this door, and found himself in a large room fitted up with desks, typewriting machine, telephone, and all other essentials of a busy business center.

An open screen divided off one end of the room. Behind it were a washstand, a wardrobe, and an iron safe set in the wall. A second door to the left led into an interior room, probably used as a private office.

Billy, who had walked in with all the independent boldness of a genuine gamin, paused and looked around him. There was no person visible.

"Bless my eyes, if they don't keep queer old hours here!" he ejaculated. "Past nine o'clock, and nobody aboard yet! I wonder if they're all

millionaires? Them's the only kind of people that can take life easy."

As he thus soliloquized, he was walking about the office, peering with a boy's curiosity into whatever attracted his attention. Passing behind the screen, he looked out of the window into a brick-paved area, back of which was another wing of the building.

As he stood there steps were heard, and some one hastily entered the room. Billy, thinking it was his new-made friend, was about to show himself, when he paused as the sound of a voice reached his ear.

The tones were familiar to him, but they were not those of Harry Weston.

Yet he had heard them somewhere very recently, though just where he could not remember.

"Nobody here yet, eh? Weston is not a very early bird. However, it is better so, for I want the coast clear. Come in, Jenkins."

Harry started at this name. He knew the voice now. It was that of the man up in Madison Square who had sworn vengeance on Harry Weston!

The shrewd boy, who had been on the point of showing himself, drew back. Here was something interesting. He must hear this thing out.

The second man, who now entered, was the slouching reprobate who had been put on the track of the lovers. The lurking boy found a small break in the screen through which he was able to survey the two persons in the outer office.

"Now," cried the first speaker, angrily, "make short work of it. I told you never to come here. If you show yourself in this office again, I'll have nothing more to do with you."

"Don't get r'ily, boss," answered Jenkins, with a leer. "I ginerally go 'most where I want, and I rayther guess you best not git on the highstrikes with me. If I'd let my cat outer the bag, you mought git scratched."

"I don't fear you, you rascal!" exclaimed the other, but Billy could see that his face turned a shade pale. "You may save your threats. Come to the point at once. You watched that pair?"

"Like a cat arter a mouse."

"And what did you learn?"

"I didn't learn enough to build a house on. They were kinder cool and scratchy, it looked to me. They kept in the Park and sot on a bench thar, keepin' as fur apart as I am from you."

"Is that so?"

"I ain't much on the lie, Mr. Morton."

"Was there nothing more?"

"Wal, I reckon. What I see'd was only a bit of a hurricane. Arter while the wind went down and they sneaked closer together, till they got sniggered up all in a heap like."

"Ha!"

Mr. Morton's face grew red.

"An' just as they was 'bout ter leave, they looked round 'em kinder sly and sheepy; and then—"

"What?"

"Wal, somethin' went off like a fire-cracker. I swow if he didn't buss that gal right afore company! Don't s'pose he'd 'a' done it if he'd knowed I was thar lyin' low."

"I wish I'd been there to fling mud in your eyes," said Turkey Billy, to himself, in disgust. "You're a sneaking cur, that's what you are."

"Did he kiss her? Is that what you mean?" asked Mr. Morton impatiently.

"My Dictionary says buss, but you kin call it kiss if you like. I jedge it's 'bout ther same thing."

The man strode angrily up and down the office, with clinched hands and biting his lips.

"Anything more?" he asked shortly.

"Guess that's 'bout the size of it. That were a good-by buss. They got up and shot out different ways. That's all I see'd."

"Very well, Jenkins. That will do. Now get out and don't come back here again. If I want you I'll seek you at the old place, 17 Hazy street."

"Git out? Yes, arter you shall out. What sort er coon are you, 'akin' me fur?"

"This will pay you, I fancy," putting some money into his hand. "Hurry out, now; I don't want Weston to see you here."

There was not much haste in Jenkins's movements, as he slouched in his usual manner out of the room. He acted very much as if he had the whip-hand of Mr. Morton.

The latter watched him with angry impatience.

"Confound the bound!" he exclaimed. "I'd give a cool thousand to be rid of him. He knows too much!"

He started to walk like a caged lion up and down the office, muttering in angry tones:

"Oh! ain't you a precious pair of ducks!" queried the screen spy to himself, as he watched the irate merchant. "Who'd ever thought I'd drop down on a job like this? Jenkins knows too much, hey? Wonder if I hadn't best pump Jenkins? I'd like to know too much as well as him. If I did I bet I'd make you squeal!"

"Harry Weston is in my way! He must be removed!" hissed the irate man. "I'll have that woman if I have to dare the State Prison to win her! What shall I do? Let me see." He walked on, seemingly lost in thought. "Oh!" he cried impatiently. "I must get out in the air. I cannot think in this close room. He shall be ruined, but I must do it safely. Yes, ruined! That is the game for me to play and it shall be played!"

Thrusting his hat upon his head he left the room. His steps could be heard traversing the hall to the street-door. As soon as he was fairly gone, Billy left his lurking-place and sprang out into the middle of the floor, his eyes dancing.

"Bully for our side!" he cried gayly. "If I ain't gettin' the best beans out of that kettle of soup, there's no use talkin'. My eyes, ain't they a lovely pair! It's lucky for this chicken they didn't freeze onto my little game, or they'd salted this Turkey's wattles right on the spot! He's going to ruin Harry Weston, is he? Not if this chicken can put a spoke in his wheel, and this bird is going to do his level best!—gobble—gobble—gobble!" and the gamin emitted so perfect an imitation of the tom-turkey-gobbler that any one hearing it would have sworn a real gobbler was in the room.

Billy seated himself in his favorite attitude on his box, dropped his chin into his hands, and lost himself so deeply in thought that he failed to hear a coming step.

The new-comer entered the outer office, and gazed with surprise upon its occupant.

"Hillo!" he exclaimed. "Oh, it's Billy the bootblack!"

The boy looked up hastily.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Weston!" he saluted.

"Good-morning, isn't it?"

"My mornin' begun six hours ago! You folks sort of take it easy."

"So, young man, that's the way you begin business, by calling me to account, eh?"

"I reckon if I take hold of this enterprise folks have got to be spryer than this."

"I'm afraid, of you, you young martinet!" laughed Mr. Weston. "I'm only a clerk, but I suppose you'll be going for Mr. Morton, my employer, next."

"Goin' for Mr. Morton? Just bet your bottom dollar on that. I'm goin' for him worse than a blizzard for a Kansas town. When I get done with him you can draw him through a key-hole."

"What do you mean?" asked Weston, struck by some hidden meaning in the boy's tone.

"Never you mind what! I just toddled down here to take that job of cashier that you promised."

"I'm afraid we can't put you on just yet as cashier," laughed the young man. "How would office-boy suit as a beginning?"

"All right. 'Most anything. I ain't particular. What's the emoluments?"

"I fear I shall have to give you a week's trial first, my lad. We can fix the wages when we see what you are worth."

"What I'm worth? Why, I'm worth my weight in gold! Put me on and I'll show you my caliber."

Mr. Weston looked at the handsome and intelligent face and the well-knit form of the lad. Under the spirit of mischief in Billy's eyes he could see indications of energy and intelligence.

"The boy has the making of a man in him," he said to himself. "Here, Billy," he remarked, "this room is dusty. Take the brush yonder, and go over it carefully. I am going out again, but will be back in half an hour."

"I reckon I can let you off that long," answered the gamin, looking at the clock, and seizing the brush he began operations with a vim that soon filled the room with a cloud of dust. Mr. Weston hastened out, flying from the vigor of his young lieutenant.

Round and round the room went the boy, making the dust fly from many a corner where it had long settled undisturbed. Stumbling over his box, he picked it up and planted it in the center of the table-desk that occupied the middle of the floor.

"You stick there," he said. "Maybe I'm done with you, and maybe I ain't. I've got a sneaking notion that I won't hold this job long,

and I'm going to make the dust fly while it lasts."

At this moment Mr. Morton, who had returned from his walk, entered the room. As he did so he broke into a choking cough, sputtering and swearing.

"What the deuce does this mean? What are you at, boy? Drop that brush, or I'll brain you!"

He snatched the brush from Billy's hand and flung it angrily across the room.

The boy turned and looked at him quizzically.

"I thought maybe folks here couldn't raise the dust," he said, "so I've been tryin' to raise it for them."

"Blast your eyes, it's enough to choke an elephant! And what's this?" he continued, laying his hand on the bootblack's box.

"Don't you try no monkey-shines with that!" warned Billy, hastily seizing it. "I don't let nobody but me fool with that bank. It's a specially chartered instertution—it is."

"What are you doing here? Who told you to use that brush? GET OUT!"

"Ain't you kind of previous, old Mortuary? I'm left here to run this shanty, and I can't say as I want any help. If you're after the job you'd best slide. You won't suit."

"Why, you impudent rascal—"

"Take a seat and a fan, and cool off a bit!" said Billy, seating himself and flinging a palm-leaf over to the now thoroughly incensed merchant. "I ain't got no ice-water handy, but if you've come in to talk business, peg away."

Mr. Morton fairly gasped with rage as he looked at the impudent intruder. Overcome for the moment by his emotions, he dropped into a chair and grasped its rounds fiercely with his hands.

"That's right," encouraged the lad. "Now, what can I do for you, Mr.—"

"What can you do for me?" The angry man fairly burst into a laugh in the stress of his emotions, but it was a savage laugh. "What can you do for me? Why, you can get out of here with your box inside of two minutes, or you'll have a crack in your skull that won't be easy mended."

"Won't you take a shine?" queried Billy. "Polish them up nobby for a dime. H'ist your continuations on this box, and I'll rattle you off in a jiffy!"

"You puppy! I'll rattle you off!" cried the furious merchant, springing up and seizing the long-handled brush.

Billy darted behind the table and stood on the defensive with his box. Mr. Morton made a furious blow at his head, which he deftly parried.

At this juncture Mr. Weston entered the office, and looked with surprise at the scene before him.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "What has the boy been doing?"

"Taking possession, blast him!" roared the merchant. "What is he doing here? Did you bring him?"

"Yes. He is my new office-boy."

"Is he? Well, he is a jewel."

"You bet I'm a jewel," retorted Billy. "I'm a whole string of diamonds. I'm a bushel basketful of rubies. I'm a sugar-barrel of pearls. But I'm going to throw up my situation. The weather is too sultry 'round here for me. I started to raise a dust, but didn't calculate to kick up such a cloud as this. Good-by. I'm off. I don't think I'm cut out for a brush cashier."

The two men looked after him in astonishment as the boy sailed independently out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE TURKEY TAKES BED AND BOARD.

"You won't mind sayin' over ag'in how much a week's your tariff?"

"Sure, an' ye can have it fur a dollar the week in advance, or two dollars if ye pay arterwards."

"Ain't that a big difference, Mrs. Malone?"

"I'll tell yiz this: Most chaps like you take the two-dollar plan, and pay me wid a sight o' their heels afore the week's out; so if I'd ax tin dollars I'd be sorry a ha'porth the better off."

The speakers were our friend, Billy Burke, and an ancient Irish lady, mistress of the house, No. 17 Hazy street, New York, out of which she made a living by subletting its rooms. The room about which they were chaffering was a narrow cell, hardly wide enough for a shake-down, and with the plaster fallen in large patches from its walls and ceiling.

"Faith, if that's the way, I'd take the one—"

price plan, and have the dollar down," laughed the gamin.

"I axes both ways for variety, but I only take one," explained the shrewd landlady. "Biddy Malone had her eye-teeth cut before she ever left Ireland. Is it wantin' the room ye'd be doin'?"

"You don't s'pose I came here to play circus, do you?"

"I'd sooner see the color of yer money than hear the length of yer tongue, young man. Ye've got my price fur the room, an' ye can have bed and board fur three dollars the week, being's ye're only a boy; and an illigant table, if it's meself that says it."

"What kind of folks have you got in your house, Mrs. Malone?"

"Faix they're as quiet as mice. They wouldn't disturb a three-months-old baby. They're jist miracles of p'acefulness, forby they don't get an over-taste of the sperits."

"Who has this room?" pointing to the right of the sorry cell for which he was dickering.

"Nobody in the wurld but Mr. Patrick Foherty, who works in the stables beyant."

"And this one?" pointing to the left-hand room.

"That's occupied at present by Mr. Jenkins, Esquire, as illigant a gentleman as ye'd care to see."

Billy's face lighted up at this information. It was precisely what he had been fishing for.

"You can't say seventy-five cents a week, Mrs. Malone?" queried he.

"Sorry a cent will I take off. It's dog-cheap now. My landlord gits the whole of it, and more to back."

"Ain't you mighty good to him?" asked Billy, seating himself on his box, and looking quizzically into her face.

"Good till him, is it? Faix, he's a way wid him that there's no overcomin'. Sorry the thraneen I'd give him if I could help it, me boy; but he's overpersuadin'."

Billy laughed at the old woman's shrewd philosophy.

"Well, say two and a half for bed and board. I ain't made of money."

"Ye'd best ax me at once to give you the board, and throw in the bit of a room. Three dollars or git; them's my terms. Sure, butter's half a dollar the pound, and praties cl'ane out o' sight. And it's an illigant table I set, as Mr. Jenkins 'll tell ye."

"Is he one of your boarders?"

"Indade an' he is."

"Well, I don't mind trying a week with you, Mrs. Malone. And if your table's as good as you say I'll recommend it to all my friends."

"Fork over the cash. That's the only recommendation as I'd give the weight of a feather fur." She held out her hand significantly.

"I'll take the other plan; two dollars for the room, and pay when the week's up."

"Git out, you omadoun! Ye're thinkin' to pay me wid the shine of yer heels, are ye? Faix, it's little ye know Biddy Malone. Begone, afore I take the broom to ye! Ye've wasted a half-hour of my vallyble time wid yer chatter."

"Didn't you quote those terms?"

"Quote, is it? I'll quote what I pl'aze. But quotin's one thing and talkin's another. Ye can't come your comether over me, me boy."

"You're a hard woman, Mrs. Malone," laughed Billy, thrusting his hand into his pocket and drawing out a handful of loose silver. "Why, old lady, I've got money enough to smother you, if I choose to show it all. Do your boarders have many visitors?" he queried, as he counted out his cash.

"Mr. Jenkins has illigant gentlemen to call on him. It's high up in the fashionable world he is."

Billy smiled covertly, as a recollection of the slouching rascal he had twice seen came to him.

"Sure, wasn't there a gentleman with a shiny hat and a velvet coat, and with the purtiest waxed mustache, called to see him last week; and they were together fur a full hour, and to the better o' that they drunk more'n the half of a bottle of whisky."

"Here's your three dollars," said the boy, laughing to himself at Mrs. Malone's idea of gentlemen. "That's good for a week's board!"

"Indade an' it is. And I wouldn't thought the likes o' ye were able for it."

"There's weeks when I don't make the half of it," acknowledged Billy. "But there's weeks when I make the double of it. When's dinner ready, Mrs. Malone?"

"Twelve o'clock and fifteen minutes. An' them that's tin minutes late 'll have to take Hobson's choice. I give ye fair warnin'."

With a toss of her head the landlady departed, leaving Billy alone in his room.

The boy flung himself on the apology for a bed which occupied one side of the narrow apartment and broke out into a fit of merry laughter.

"Biddy Malone's a jolly old lady, I'll go high on that. The chap that comes it over her has got to get up three hours before daylight. It won't do to let her guess what Turkey's after, or she might let the cat right out of the bag."

He sprung to his feet as the thought of his errand came to him, and began to explore the room.

"That elegant gentleman, Jerry Jenkins, has this room to the left. And there's a gay sport calls on him, with velvet coat and waxed mustache. That's Morton, for a dime. And I'll bet another dime I get the work in on their little game before I'm through. He's goin' to play it on Harry Weston and Nelly Brown, is he? Let him look out he don't get a raw persimmon in his pie."

As he soliloquized the boy was closely examining the left-hand wall of his room. Here and there the plaster had scaled off, in one place near the ceiling revealing the lath and joists beneath.

Mounting the little rough table with which this room was "furnished," Billy closely investigated this broken patch. It opened into the space between the joist, beyond which were the lath and plastering of the adjoining room.

This was sound, but Billy had come prepared. Drawing a long gimlet from his pocket, he inserted it between the laths and quickly bored a hole through the plaster into the next room.

It was a narrow opening, not likely to be noticed from the other side, yet it gave him a view of a small patch of the opposite floor. Looking through this for a minute, he shook his head and began boring again. He did not cease, in fact, till he had made half a dozen holes, looking in various directions.

"There; I reckon that little dodge is in shape," the Shine-em-up Detective exclaimed, with satisfaction. "I've got Jerry Jenkins, professional crook, under my eye now, you bet! If he tries any monkeying I'll go my blackin'-box ag'in' a postage-stamp that I'll fetch him up mighty sudden."

Leaping lightly from his perch, Billy put away his gimlet, picked up his box, thrust his hat firmly on his head and prepared for the street.

"I've got to make my three dollars before the week's out, or Biddy Malone 'll shoot me lively. It won't pay to let the grass grow under my feet while this job's on hand."

In a few minutes more our ragged, self-constituted detective was on the street, actively on the lookout for jobs. And work rolled in somewhat lively that morning. Before the hour of noon he had put the largest end of a dollar to the right side of his bank account.

"That's not so bad," he said. "Now I'll go try Mrs. Biddy Malone's illigant table. I can't say just how I'll get along if she puts on too much style, as I ain't used to airs. But when it comes to appetite I reckon this young turkey kin gobble up as much grub as a fu'st-class Dutchman."

Promptly at a quarter-past twelve he presented himself at the Hazey street mansion. He had not forgotten Mrs. Malone's warning.

The dining-room, which he found without much difficulty, was not a very superbly furnished apartment. The only pictures on the walls were those of a dilapidated wall-paper. The tablecloth looked as if it had not seen a washtub for six weeks; and the table-ware was past danger of cracking, for it contained about all the cracks it was able to hold.

The food was plain, but substantial. Boiled potatoes in plenty, coarse meat, but abundance of it, bread that looked as if base-balls could be made of it, and butter that Billy felt certain could not have cost fifty cents a pound. It looked little and strong enough to serve as the light-weight champion in a boxing-match.

The new boarder, after taking all this in at a glance, took an observation of his fellow-guests. They were no more promising than the rest of the paraphernalia.

There were seven or eight of them in all, and others came in from time to time, rough, begrimed, unwashed fellows, street and stable workers the most of them, apparently.

At the head of the table sat Jenkins. Rough as he had looked in company with Mr. Morton, he was well dressed in contrast with these ragged and soiled customers, and Billy could see why Mrs. Malone considered him as her "gentleman" boarder.

"Now, fellers, dig in," cried Jenkins. "Them as ain't on hand 'll have to take pot-luck."

The guests waited for no second invitation, but plunged in so eagerly and unceremoniously that Billy felt the full weight of Mrs. Malone's warning. Taking a vacant seat, he plunged in with the rest, fearing that five minutes' wait might make a famine in the land.

Few words were exchanged. Those people came to eat, not to talk, and time was short, appetite sound; so conversation played but a second part in the game.

"That's right, young 'un," exclaimed Mrs. Malone, looking with approval on Turkey Billy's efforts to do his share. "There's plenty of it, so don't save yer bacon. I don't like finicky folks at my table."

"I reckon yer don't have many on 'em," cried Jenkins, with a horse laugh. "If there's better feeders in York, I dunno where. Hillo, young gutter-snipe, where'd you come from?"

"I judge I don't owe you no rent!" retorted Billy. "I didn't run away from any of your pens."

"Quick on the trigger, ain't yer? Where'd you git this goslin' from, Biddy?"

"I niver axes my boarders no imperdent questions," returned Mrs. Malone. "Pay's the passport here; and don't-pays gits the door. Them's my rules."

"And mighty found ones they are. Then I reckon the gamin has shelled out."

"I judge he has," returned Billy. "I'll be pretty short before I ask you to pay for me!" and he at once got up and left the room with his most independent swagger.

"That's a lively little spark. I like him," cried Jerry, with a loud laugh. "Where'd you pick him up, Biddy?"

"He flings the brush, that boy does; polishes up folks' brogans. I don't know a ha'porth more 'bout him. He can be a jailbird or a Congressman; it's all one to Biddy Malone, so he pays for his grub."

"A jailbird or a Congressman—ha! ha! That's good!" cried the "gentleman." "I think we can use 'im."

"Use 'im, is it? Ye'll have a good toime, I'm a-sayin' a-doin' that same!" retorted the dame.

"Um! We'll see! Just the kind for an errand boy, you know," and Jenkins left the room in some haste as if an idea had struck him.

CHAPTER IV.

A PAIR OF TURTLE-DOVES.

DURING the next two weeks the Turkey kept up a close espionage over Jerry Jenkins, but with no satisfactory result. Of course his business engaged him during the day, but he had no expectation of Mr. Morton calling on a low-down rogue like Jenkins except under cover of night, so he did his watching in the evenings, whenever the sound of voices came from the adjoining room.

Meanwhile Billy had made himself very free and familiar at Mrs. Malone's table, and had become quite a favorite among her boarders. Jenkins, in particular, had, apparently, taken a fancy to him, but Billy cultivated none of them; he was saucy and independent, which seemed to just suit their rough tempers.

Two weeks, and he began to get discouraged. He feared that he was on the wrong track, and that Morton was working up some scheme with which Jenkins had nothing to do.

What was next to be done? Should he give up his present quest, and try and discover what Morton was at? He shook his head doubtfully at this idea. He stood an excellent chance of being kicked out if he should show his face in Morton's office.

"Hain't I best give up the whole job? What's these folks to me, anyhow? A sensible boy would let them fight their own battles. But then, I ain't a sensible boy, so that don't count. And Mr. Weston tried to do me a good turn, if it didn't work. And I don't like that Morton for nothing. And they're just a pair of babes in the wood, that wants somebody that's up to snuff to look after them."

Billy raised his head proudly as he came to this conclusion. It was his private opinion that if he was not "up to snuff" nobody was, and that there was more wit in his little finger than in the brain of half the men.

The Turkey was not wanting in a good opinion of himself, as may be seen.

He gave a start of surprise as he lifted his eyes. Before him were two persons whom he recognized at a glance—no others than Harry Weston and Nelly Brown!

They were too much absorbed in one another

to notice him. He stood looking at them with a cynical smile.

"Well, if they ain't a pair of turtle-doves, I'll sell out and charge nothing for good-will," he said to himself. "A sharp chap might scoop their eyes out, and they wouldn't know that anything was missing."

"Hullo!" he shouted, starting the lovers from their preoccupation. "If you don't look sharp there'll be a pair of horses and a big four-wheeler right over you."

Harry started hastily and looked around, while Nelly clung to him with a cry of alarm.

"You young rascal!" exclaimed Harry angrily, "what do you mean? There's no team there."

"I didn't say there was. I was only talking about what *might* be."

"Dear! what a start he gave me!" declared Nelly, still clinging to her lover.

"Oh, you're all right," returned the roguish boy. "There ain't nothing he likes better."

The conscious girl released her lover, and turned away with a rosy blush.

"See here, boy," cried Harry angrily, "you've got entirely too long a tongue."

"Not a bit of it. It's my stock in trade. I do as much business with my tongue as with my brushes."

"You don't know when to use it, and when to put a lock on it. For instance, you made a sweet mess of things that day you came to my office. What made you so impudent to Mr. Morton?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Billy; "didn't I astonish that chap! I never saw anybody in such a way. Didn't he prance round lively?"

"You lost a situation by your smartness; so I don't think all the fun was on your side."

"With him? You ain't supposing I'd take a job under him! Not if the court knows herself! If it was all your shanty now, Mr. Weston, I'd have stuck like a leech. But I wouldn't read newspapers for that galoot for fifty dollars a week."

"What makes you take such a dislike to Mr. Morton? He is a gentleman with whom I have been engaged for ten years, and I always found him very kind and obliging."

"He's got an ax to grind, then," declared the boy stubbornly. "He's playing soft on you 'cause you're doing big work for little pay."

"That's just what I told you, Harry," cried Nelly, who had been listening with much interest to this conversation.

"You did, hey?" exclaimed Billy, delightedly. "Then I'm on the right track. I knowed it. He couldn't shut up my optics, nary time."

"You're a very smart young man," retorted Harry, satirically.

"That's what folks generally find out before they know me long," rejoined Billy, with great complacency. "I do my best to hide it, but it peeps out in spite of me. It's kind of awkward sometimes to be so smart."

"I should judge so," rejoined Nelly, with a gay laugh at the irrepressible boy. "If it should strike in it might prove dangerous."

"It generally strikes out, with me. And sometimes it hits the mark. Now I'll tell you what I've found out by my smartness. Mr. Morton ain't an angel, and he ain't within ten miles of being one. And, what's more, he's rigging up a plot against you two that'll raise Old Nick, if I don't countermarch on him."

"What do you mean?" cried Nelly, in quick alarm.

"Mean! He means nothing," said Harry, disdainfully.

"Don't! You'd best cry a halt, Mr. Weston, or I'll walk off and drop the job, and then see what becomes of you."

The consequential importance of Billy's tone struck his hearers so comically that they burst into simultaneous laughter.

"I'll tell you what it is," continued Billy: "you're not able to take care of yourselves, that's flat. Now I'm going to talk to you like a father, and let you into a thing or two."

They looked into the begrimed face and sparkling eyes, and laughed more merrily than ever.

"It's fun, isn't it?" cried Billy. "Just wait, that's all. As I said, I'm going to talk to you like a father. Now, see here, Miss Nelly, hasn't Mr. Morton been trying to play sweet on you?"

"What's that?" cried Harry, with a sudden start.

"Hasn't he been courting you; asking for kisses and sweetmeats, and wanting you to say yes, and all that?"

Nelly had started at the question more violently than her lover. She looked at the boy in

dismay and confusion, making no effort to answer him, and seeming as if begging him to be silent.

"What is this?" demanded Harry, looking in surprise at her distress. "Is it the truth? And you have never told me a word! By Heaven—"

"Harry! Harry!" she cried in alarm, clinging to his arm. "Do nothing rash. It is so; but I was afraid to tell you."

"He has been seeking to win you; and I knew nothing of it!"

"He had no chance to win me, Harry. You know whom I love too well to think that. I was afraid there might be words between you; you might throw up your situation; I knew not what might happen. I fancy I put an end to his suit, so I thought it might die away in silence. But this long-tongued boy! How did he ever find it out?"

"Find it out? Why, bless you, I've only begun to empty my bag yet! Wait till I tell you all I've found out."

"You know more, then?" Harry seized him by the arm impatiently. "What more do you know?"

"I know that this darling, kind, sweet Mr. Edward Morton is a rascal from his head to his heels; I know that he hasn't given it up by a whole jugful; and I know that he's made up his mind that he's going to have Nelly Brown whether she says yes or no."

Nelly, her face turning from red to white, seized him by the shoulder with a nervous clutch, and looked with half-affright into his meaning face.

"Have me whether I say yes or no! How! What do you mean? Am I to have no voice in the matter?"

"He's going to squeeze you, Miss Nelly, that's all."

"Squeeze me!"

She pushed Billy away with a look of indignation.

"Oh, I don't mean like Mr. Weston here squeezes you! I wasn't thinking about arm-squeezes."

"What then?" cried Harry, angrily, while Nelly turned away with a deep blush. "Or no; you need say no more. I fancy we've heard enough from you."

"I'm going to tell you what kind of a squeeze, and you can't choke me off," retorted Billy.

"He's got it laid out to have Miss Nelly kidnapped; and he'll do it if she ain't mighty wide awake. That's one of his dodges. And another is, he's going to play some ugly game on you, Mister Weston—get you arrested for stealing or something, and send you to the Island to break stone. If he can play the convict dodge on you, he thinks Miss Nelly'll drop into his mouth like a ripe peach."

"Great Heaven, boy! What do you mean! What warrant have you for all this?" exclaimed the frightened girl, excitedly, while her face grew deathly pale.

"Don't get skeered. I'm working for you. I'll take the wind out of his sails; only give me time!"

Harry looked eagerly into the boy's intelligent face, his mind full of doubt what to make of all this. Billy's knowledge of a mystery which had been concealed from himself went far to shake his doubts.

"How do you know all this?" he demanded. "And, what more do you know? Tell me all. I must have the facts before I can decide."

Thus requested, Billy proceeded to relate what he had had learned, telling the story of the two occasions in which he had overheard Morton and his villainous associate, and the threats that had been uttered.

The lovers listened to this recital with varied feelings. The lady was full of concern and alarm.

"You must leave your situation at once!" she cried. "You are in danger every moment you stay there!"

"I don't fear him," Harry replied. "My books and my money are all right. He cannot hurt me. It is you who are threatened. Great Heaven! Nelly, if he should—"

"Don't fear," she answered, shortly. "I will not fall into any of his traps, I promise you that."

"And I'll keep my eyes mighty wide open," broke in Billy. "I'm watching Jenkins like a cat watches a mouse. If he's in the game I'm going to salt it, sure."

"You are watching him! You have left home and taken boarding to do so! I must pay all its costs. How much do I owe you, my lad?"

"Left home!" cried Billy. "Bless your eyes, I didn't have no home to leave! I've been noth-

ing but a wandering orphan these ten years, bunking where I could, and getting grub whenever I could find it. Mrs. Malone's is a rough hole, but there's plenty to eat, of the kind."

"And you've been at no extra expense?"

"Not a cent. She only charges me three dollars a week, being's I'm a boy and sleep in a six-foot room."

"Here is some money, at any rate. You may need it for other purposes. If you learn anything of value—"

"I'll post you. But both of you have got to keep wide-awake for Morton."

"You can depend on us."

After some further conversation Billy proceeded home, rather satisfied in his own mind with the result of the conference. He had put the lovers on their guard, at all events, and let them know what he had done for them.

Night had fallen when he reached Hazey street. The supper hour was long past, but he was not hungry, and proceeded at once to his room, cogitating with himself on the events of the day.

He was about to fling his hat on the bed, when he stood like a statue, listening to sounds that reached him from the next room.

Faint as the voice was, Billy recognized something familiar in its tones.

His face flashed with intelligence as he seized his chair and placed it noiselessly under his post of observation.

CHAPTER V.

A SCOUT OFF THE TRACK.

THE lookout-holes which the young gamin had made through the wall commanded but a small portion of the floor beyond.

They had been made very small to hide them from observation, and he could not get his eye near enough to command a wide circle of vision. Yet the half-dozen openings enabled him to observe the room at as many points.

It was to hear, rather than to see, that interested him now.

When he got his ear to the wall the voice in Jenkins's room grew louder, and he was easily able to make out what was said. Its tones, too, grew more familiar. He felt sure that the voice was that of Edward Morton.

"I've got you nailed this time, old shock," said the boy gleefully, to himself. "I reckon you don't know that walls have ears, and that a little chap called Turkey Billy is playing one of the cutest games on you that was ever got up."

The voice came louder.

"At nine o'clock, then, on Friday night. There is no need to say more. You know your part in the game. And, for your life, don't let out my name. If you have to give names, Jacob Jones is your man. Don't forget—Jacob Jones!"

"It's a devilish risky bizness," growled out the hoarse voice of Jenkins. "Devilish risky. If I was nabbed, it'd be a good five years."

"You're not afraid?"

"And you, blast yer eyes, are coverin' up yer track so clean that a ten-hoss power microscope couldn't see you in it."

"You're not afraid, are you?" sneered Morton.

"I don't skeer easy. And I don't sell cheap, neither. Tell yer what, I ain't goin' to tetch this job under a solid five hundred."

"Come, come, Jenkins, you wouldn't rob a man!"

"Five hundred, and half down, or you may git somebody else."

Their voices now dropped to a lower tone, and the listener found himself unable to catch more than an occasional word. But he was satisfied that they were still debating the question of money, and that Jenkins held stiffly to his price.

Unable to hear, he attempted to see. One of his peep-holes brought Jenkins's face clearly into view, lit up by the rays of an oil-lamp. A second showed him the shoulder and part of the arm of a second person, whom he could only guess to be Morton. A third and somewhat larger one revealed a large patch of the surface of a table.

This attracted his attention, for on it were two hands, white and well-formed, on one of the fingers of which gleamed a diamond ring. They were engaged at that moment in counting a somewhat thick wad of bank-notes.

"He's caved," said Billy to himself. "He's paying Jenkins the two-fifty. What's it for, that's what I'd give a brass monkey to know. What's this job that's worth a cool five hundred to try, and that's a State's Prison biz if it falls through?"

One of the two hands now pushed across the table the counted money. The other gathered up the remnant of the notes.

Billy could next see a pair of coarse, brown hands thrust forward, which seized the notes and began to count them in a much slower and more awkward fashion than had the diamond-adorned hands.

This pantomime fascinated the boy. No words were spoken, but words were not needed. This was a finger talk that took the place of verbal language.

Finally the rough hands gathered up the notes into a bunch, while a hoarse growl of satisfaction was audible.

"Bought and sold," said the listener to himself. "But it's Jenkins that's bought and Morton that's sold; and I'm the chap he's sold to. Jenkins is cute, and Morton is cuter; but we'll see if Billy Turkey isn't cutest. Just wait till they let a little more of this cat out of the bag."

"Will the carriage be—" began Jenkins.

"Haven't we settled all that?"

"Yes."

"You don't want to be told all over again?"

"I calkerlate I've got it down."

"Then we'll not open the subject again. In business of this kind it is not safe to multiply words."

Billy was down again at the bottom of the ladder. All he had learned was that a five-hundred-dollar criminal job was to be done on Friday night, at nine o'clock, and that a carriage was to be provided. Putting this to what he knew before, he settled in his mind that the abduction of Nelly Brown was plotted.

What should he do? Warn Mr. Weston? But he did not know where he lived, and did not care to show himself at Morton's office. Should he put Miss Brown on her guard? He knew no more where she lived than he did in the case of her lover.

Sharp-witted as the boy was there was some important information he had neglected to obtain. Nothing remained but to put himself on the track of Jerry Jenkins at the time specified.

"If he flings me Friday night he's got to be spry," soliloquized Billy. "He's my meat, and I'm going to stick to him like a burr to a sheep's tail."

He paused and listened again. Some words had struck his ear that seemed significant.

"Take this letter," began the voice of Morton. "Run up to Harlem in the Elevated— No, no, I don't want any more."

The observant lad saw Jenkins's hand push a tumbler a third full of an amber-hued liquid across the table.

"You ain't no temperance crank, are you? You ain't playin' that on me?"

"Not much; but I haven't a steel-clad throat, like you," was the laughing reply. "No more for me."

"Mighty queer taste you've got," growled Jenkins, as he drew back the glass and swallowed its contents.

His retreating fingers were followed across the table by the diamonded hand, holding a sealed and stamped letter.

"Take this," continued the visitor. "Be sure and keep it clean—I'm afraid of your hands sometimes. Drop it in any letter-box in Harlem about nine or ten to-morrow. I can trust you for that!"

"I've got to pay my fare and wet my whistle."

"Here's money for that." The hand that had passed the letter followed it with a bank-note.

"All serene; I'll do it. What's in this biz?"

"That's no affair of yours, Jenkins. I want this mailed in Harlem, and can't go there myself to-morrow, that's all." He pushed back his chair and rose. "There's nothing more! You understand what's to be done?"

"I've got it as clean as a whistle."

"Then let me out. Friday night, at nine sharp, remember."

"Ay, ay."

As the visitor stood up his face came opposite to one of the boy's observation-holes. Billy had his eye to it in an instant, and caught a glimpse of the lower half of the face of the departing visitor.

He fell back in amazement. That man with the heavy black whiskers and unbrowned skin was not Edward Morton. He remembered Morton too well for that. He had a fair complexion and smoothly-shaved chin, and bore no resemblance to this man.

What did this mean? Had he been deceived in the tones of the voice? It is easy to hear what we expect to hear. Billy knew this, and fancied that expectation had cheated him.

All this passed through his mind in a second.

Then he glued his eye to the peep-hole again, for another observation of that face. He was too late; it had moved out of the line of vision.

The next moment the door opened and steps could be heard outside. Billy would have looked out of his own door, but it was too risky. If these men got an idea they were watched his opportunity would be at an end.

He flung himself back in his chair in a quandary. This discovery that the man he had been listening to was not Edward Morton set him all at sea. What to make of it he did not know. Had he missed what he was after and fallen on the track of some bit of rascality with which he had nothing particular to do?

He sprung up as a thought came to his mind. Suppose Jenkins should look into his room, as he sometimes did, and fancy he had been playing the listener. The man was suspicious, and was wise enough to know that his walls were thin.

His step was approaching on his return. It was too late to leave the room. Billy, at a moment's impulse, plunged under the bed. There was only space enough between it and the floor to admit his spare figure.

He was just in time. Jenkins approached, opened the door of his room, and looked in.

"Nobody at home," he muttered, with an air of satisfaction. "We talked sometimes a bit too loud, like fools as we were. But it's all right; the boy's out, and there's nobody bunkin' in the room on t'other side. A thunderin' smart boy that youngster is, too. Wouldn't like him to git on to any job of mine."

He retired, and the "thunderin' smart boy" crawled from under the bed with a grin of satisfaction at his unobserved-for praise.

"Maybe you'll think I'm smarter before you're done with me," he muttered. "There's something mighty queer about this job, and I'd give a cow to see through it. I've a notion that letter would let me in, if I could only get hold of it."

Fancying he could think the mystery out better in bed, the boy undressed and placed himself under the covers preparatory to a good, long think.

What might have come of it if he had stayed awake it is hard to tell, but in five minutes he was sound asleep, and his thoughts tightly locked away in the casket of slumber.

When he awoke morning had dawned, the sun was shining into his window, and he knew from past experience that he would have to be on the alert if he wanted to get a reasonable share of breakfast.

He concluded to breakfast first and think afterward. At the table Jenkins announced that he had a bit of business in Brooklyn and must be off early. This purpose he put in execution as soon as he left the table, leaving Billy in doubt.

That letter was in his pocket—that the boy felt sure of. There was no one to search his room. Jenkins was not in the habit of going out so early, and he was not due at Harlem till nine o'clock, so he couldn't have gone there yet. Perhaps he really had something to attend to first. Something, it might be, in relation to that Friday night business.

Billy had lost interest in the latter since he had found it was a stranger's job; but he wanted that letter. There was a mystery about the affair which he was eager to clear up.

He found no more time to think now than the night before, and ended his interrupted cogitations by taking the Elevated to Harlem. He felt that he must act now; it was too late to settle the affair by thinking.

He reached the station in Harlem at a little after eight o'clock.

At ten minutes past nine Jerry Jenkins left the cars at the same station, and walked along the street leading from it with his usual half-slouching, half-swaggering gait.

He looked around him for a letter-box as he went, and when at length he came in sight of one, he drew a letter from his pocket and held it in his hand as he approached the box.

At that instant there came an exclamation and a stumbling noise behind him, and some one struck with a surge against his arm, knocking the letter from his hand and flinging it ten feet in advance.

"Excuse me; I stumped my toe," came in a boy's voice, as a slight form shot past him and picked up the letter. "Here's your letter. I didn't go to knock it—Hillo! if it isn't Jerry Jenkins! Who'd thought to see you here?"

"It's you, is it, youngster? What the blazes fetches you out here?"

"I come to see my uncle. He lives out here. Didn't expect to see nobody else I knowed,

Here's your letter. I'll drop it in the box for you."

Without waiting for a response, Billy lifted the lid to the letter-box slot and thrust the letter in before the eyes of his companion.

"That's right, ain't it? You wanted it posted?"

"It's done now, whether it's right or wrong. It's all correct this time, but ye're a little bit quick on the trigger, Billy."

They walked side by side for some distance, talking. Billy at length excused himself, as he must go hunt up his uncle. But he was no sooner out of sight of his late companion than he burst into a boyish laugh of triumph. He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a letter.

"I come it on Jerry Jenkins, that time," he cried. "Posted his letter right before his eyes, too; but, somehow, it got posted in my pocket! The one that went into the letter-box is for John Smith, and I hope John Smith will get it. I had plenty of time to write it while I was waiting for Jerry. Now, who's this one for?"

He raised his hand with the latter and looked at the address on the envelope.

The letter dropped from his fingers, and he started back with surprise, while a loud whistle of astonishment came from his lips.

"Edward Morton, Esquire." Well, if this soup isn't getting thick! It's queer! It's a letter to Edward Morton. What does it all mean, anyhow?"

Recovering the letter he had dropped, Billy set his brains to work on that long-deferred think.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLAY AT THE BOWERY.

It was Friday afternoon. Billy Turk was making his way home after a successful day's labor, with his box flung over his shoulder, and his fingers jingling the silver in his pocket, while he whistled as gayly as if he had not a care left in the world.

"There's one more day in," he said to himself, cheerily, "and my pocket just bursting with cash. I don't believe there's another bootblack in New York that's got as good a run of trade, or can come up to your uncle in putting on a shine. If this keeps up I'll just buy out Vanderbilt and start a line of steamboats."

He was recalled from his thoughts of wealth by seeing two figures before him, one of whom he recognized at sight as Jerry Jenkins. The other a second glance told him was Edward Morton. There was no mistake this time. There was the fair skin, the smooth chin, the well-waxed mustache.

It was a retired street, outside the usual track of travel. Billy, at once converted from the successful merchant to the scout, slipped up behind them and glided into a neighboring doorway, eager to learn the subject of their conversation.

"The letter didn't come?" exclaimed Jerry, in a tone of doubt and surprise.

"No."

"Then it's Uncle Sam that's ter blame. I 'beyed orders, right to ther nail. It went into ther box at Harlem, afore half-past nine that mornin', I'll take my blessed affydavy on that."

"No mistake, Jenkins?"

"Not a ghost of a mistake. I 'arned my money fair and square."

"It's confoundedly queer. There was no money in it to induce any thief to steal it. I must have a duplicate posted and see how that comes."

"And 'bout that other biz? You know—"

"Hush!"

Morton looked around him cautiously, but did not seem to catch sight of the lurking boy.

He walked on, Jerry following. What further they said was lost. The boy could not get near enough again to hear them. After a few minutes more they parted. Whatever their plot, the scout was left in the dark.

He thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat and felt with much satisfaction the letter that reposed there.

"Going to send a duplicate, is he? All right, old chap, I'll keep the original. It's ag'in' the law to rob the mail, but this never got into the mail, so that law don't count. And I ain't opened it, and ain't going to just now; so I won't get into any scrape that way. I said I'd post it, but I reckon I didn't say when."

He walked on, deeply cogitating. It was Friday. On this night the mysterious plot, of which he had heard some of the details, was to be put into effect.

Should he try to trace this scheme of rascality? So far, he knew it was nothing which con-

cerned him; but there was the natural curiosity of the boy, and the natural instinct of the scout. On the whole, he felt strongly inclined to put himself on the track of Jerry Jenkins.

The hard-fisted sons of toil who gathered around the supper-table at Mrs. Malone's that night seemed principally concerned in finding out in how short a time they could put out of sight a liberal allowance of food.

Scarce a word was spoken while anything to eat remained; then Jenkins, who as usual occupied the head of the table, remarked:

"Well, fellers, what's in the wind for to-night?"

"There's a cock-fight down at Peters's. On the sly, you twig. But that's where I'm goin' to vest my fifty cents."

"Cock-fights is 'g'in' the law," said Jenkins, reprovingly.

"The law be blazed! You're gettin' mighty delicate 'bout the law."

"Allers was. Couldn't break ther law on no 'count," grinned Jenkins. "And yer oughtn't to be teachin' sich doctrines 'fore youngsters like Billy here. Wanter spile his morals, hey?"

"Bootblacks don't have none o' them things," retorted Foherty, the other speaker.

"That's all you know about it," cried Billy indignantly. "I don't know just what morals is, but if it's worth having we've got it. I reckon a bootblack is as good as a hod-carrier or a millionaire."

"Good for you, little 'un!" laughed Jenkins. "How's bizness ter-day, Billy?"

"Prime!" answered the boy, rattling his pocket.

"Ain't got a five you can lend me?"

"Ain't I? You haven't seen my pile. Just fork over a ten for security, and you'll see how soon I fetch up a five."

"Soon's you kin git the ten changed, eh? I calkerlate I won't deal."

"You're a prime coon, Billy," declared Foherty, slapping the boy on the shoulder. "You come with me; I'll rat you into the cock-fight. It's 'bout time you were gettin' your eddication."

"Sure, an' ye'll do nothin' o' the sort," declared Mrs. Malone, who was listening. "The boys now larn mischief soon enough, widout the men to t'ache them. I'll niver consent to sich a thing."

"Your boarders don't belong to you, Mrs. Malone."

"I've got a conscience, Pat Foherty, and the boy's under my care. So away wid your temptations, and say no more."

"Good for you, Biddy Malone," laughed Jenkins. "You come with me, Billy. They're goin' to play 'The Bootblack of New York' at the old Bowery to-night. I'll take you, and let you pay my way in."

"Oh, yes! when the moon rises at ten o'clock in the morning," rejoined Billy, with a knowing wink. "I won't mind going, but it's got to be a Camptown muster."

"An' what in the wurld is a Camptown muster?" asked the landlady.

"It's where everybody pays his way, and thank ye to nobody."

"Faix, but ye're a deep one, Billy," cried Mrs. Malone, with a laugh. "Stick till that, my boy, and you'll git along."

"All right," rejoined Jenkins. "We'll go see 'The Bootblack' at the Bowery, and everybody paddle his own canoe."

There was a sly look on Jerry's face, as he rose from the table with those words. What to make of the theater engagement Billy didn't know, but he made up his mind to keep his eyes wide open. Did Jenkins suspect him, and had he made this proposal as a means of throwing him from the track?

If that was his purpose he was likely to defeat himself, for he had roused the boy's suspicions, and was not likely to get rid of him so easily.

Jenkins was in earnest. He renewed his proposition, and the ill-assorted pair started together for the Bowery at the proper hour. On their way Billy chattered in a lively tone. He had not seen many plays, and was full of hopes for delight in the bootblack drama. Jenkins listened with a cynical curl of the lip. If he had laid a trap the boy seemed to have fallen into it.

They reached the house and each paid his way as proposed, taking their seats in the gallery. Soon the orchestra blared through its overture, the curtain rose and the actors made their entrance upon the stage.

Billy up to this moment had been lost in a quandary. Jenkins was engaged at some very different place and in some very different

business at nine o'clock that night. He had already been paid a large sum for the job, whatever it was. Yet here it was past eight, and he was seated in a theater, apparently with nothing on hand but to enjoy the play.

This was certainly very odd. What to make of it the boy didn't know.

The play, however, drove all these thoughts from his mind. It had not progressed many minutes before he had lost all recollection of Jenkins's plot, and was thoroughly wrapped up in the fortunes of the stage bootblack.

This ragged boy, with his torn coat, his smirched face and his sharp tongue, was enough like himself to arrest all Billy's attention. And he soon became involved in the opening of a series of exciting adventures that made the listener oblivious to all that was taking place around him.

Had Jenkins got up and silently left the house at that moment, Billy would not have missed him. But he took a different course.

"How do you like the play?" he asked, looking at the absorbed boy.

"It's bully!" returned the youthful auditor. "That chap's just gay."

"I'm goin' out fur a plug o' 'baccy. I can't never set still 'thout a chaw. I'll be back in a minute."

In much less than a minute Billy's thoughts were turned into a new channel. He had forgotten the play and was full of the plot.

"All right," he muttered, with seeming indifference, "slide ahead."

Yet Jenkins had hardly disappeared through the door before the boy was up and after him. This tobacco dodge, he said to himself, was much too thin to discount Billy Turk.

Reaching the outer door, he caught a glimpse of Jenkins about ten yards distant. He even heard from him what seemed the sound of a laugh.

Billy's lip curled disdainfully.

"He laughs best who laughs last," he said to himself. "You think you're smart and I'm dumb, Jerry Jenkins. We'll see if it isn't t'other way."

The slouching figure in front moved on with some rapidity. Billy followed with much caution. It was quickly evident that Jenkins had something else in view than tobacco, for he had already passed two cigar-stores without halting.

He continued his journey, through street after street, making for the east side of the city. Billy glided along, about fifty paces in the rear, watching his every movement.

For considerably more than a mile this progress continued. They were now in a quiet quarter of the city, among moderate-sized but respectable dwellings, where very few people were abroad even at this early hour of the night.

"Them that are out are off fer Broadway," said the boy to himself. "Folks ain't likely to hang around here. Hello, he's slid again!"

Jenkins had turned a sharp corner into another street. Billy ran quickly to the corner, eager to get him in view again; but on reaching that point nobody was in sight.

He hurried forward. Another street crossed not far ahead. Jenkins had probably turned down this to right or left. But on reaching it Billy was not able to see him in either direction.

Had Jenkins seen him following and managed to throw him from his track? Billy began to think so, and ran rapidly down the cross street to the next corner. He returned and ran in the opposite direction. All in vain. No trace of the slouching villain was to be seen.

Thoroughly mystified, the young spotter wandered round the locality for some twenty minutes, but to no purpose. Jenkins had disappeared as thoroughly as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"I don't know that it's any affair of mine, anyhow," said the young scout.

The grapes were sour now that they were out of his reach.

He was about to give up the quest in disgust, when his eyes fell upon a carriage drawn up in a dark place on the street he had just entered, and about two hundred yards away. Two or three figures were visible near it. He remembered what had been said about a carriage, and hurried up.

Just then there seemed a slight struggle in the group at the carriage, there came a faint cry in a woman's voice, which was instantly suppressed, and the next instant the forms disappeared in the carriage.

Billy, now thoroughly wide awake, ran toward it with all his speed, but he was yet a

hundred feet distant when the carriage whirled away at full speed, driving furiously down the dark street.

He pursued it at a full run, and in a minute or two more pursuer and pursued alike had vanished from the scene, and only the sound of far-off wheels remained.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABDUCTION AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

THE newspapers of the next morning, in their columns of local events, contained a startling announcement. A young lady residing on Madison avenue had been kidnapped, carried off under the very eyes of the police, at as early an hour as nine o'clock in the evening.

A boy, one of New York's corps of bootblacks, had seen a struggle, heard a woman's cry of distress, and seen a person forced into a carriage, which instantly drove off at full speed.

The boy had followed as rapidly as possible, but had soon lost sight of the fast-driven carriage. He had given this information to a policeman, and continued the pursuit before the officer of the law could learn his name and address.

Inquiry in the neighborhood which the boy had indicated showed that a young lady had disappeared from No. — Madison avenue, a Miss Ellen Brown, who had hastily left the house shortly before nine in consequence of a note brought by a messenger.

This note lay on her table. It proved to be from a Mr. Harry Weston, stating that his sister would be in town that evening, by the half-past nine train on the New York Central, and requesting her, as he had suddenly been called away on important business, to meet and take care of the young lady for the night.

The newspaper report went on to say that Mr. Weston, who was well known as the confidential clerk of Mr. Edward Morton, commission broker, had been seen, and declared the note to be a forgery. His sister was not coming to town, he had not been detained by business, and the whole affair was a villainous concoction.

The news had plunged Mr. Weston into the greatest distress; he seemed unable to explain the abduction, and had spent half the night in distracted wanderings and calls at Police Headquarters in forlorn hope of tidings.

Such were the leading points in the somewhat sensational reports, with flaring head-lines, contained in several of the Saturday morning papers. Some of these suggested that there was an engagement of marriage between Weston and the lady, and that the abduction had been the work of a jilted lover, who had taken this violent step to oust his rival. Who this lover was, however, none of the journals stated.

The affair created some excitement. The dawn of the next day had failed to bring the missing lady back to her home, or yield any tidings of her whereabouts, and the whole police force of the city were put on the lookout for any traces of the abduction, while one of the most skillful detectives was employed to work up the case.

This mysterious outrage was talked over at Mrs. Malone's breakfast-table the next morning. Billy Turk had read the story of the affair in the morning Sun, and detailed it to his interested auditors.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he queried. "What's our police for, I'd like to know, if they can't stop that sort of thing?"

"Ther perlice! They're good for nothin' and never were," growled Jenkins. "Yer mought carry a cow off under their eyes, and they wuldn't see her tail. That kind o' jobs ain't nothin' new."

"It's a cryin' shame, that's what it is!" declared Mrs. Malone. "An innocent young lady to be seized in the open strate, and carried off the saints know where. Faix, and it would do me good to have my two hands in the hair of the chap that done it."

Billy was watching Jenkins keenly during this conversation; but that individual ate his breakfast with his usual calmness.

"Ther's nothin' new in runnin' off with a gal," he said. "It's done, I calkerlate, nine nights out of ten. Don't allers git sich a spread in ther papers, that's all."

"I only wish I'd been the bootblack that seen them; I bet they wouldn't got away from me so easy. I'm some on the run," declared Billy, with a great show of excitement. "I'm going to find out who that boy was before the day's over. Some of the fellows will know."

"How did you like 'The Bootblack' play at the Bowery, Billy?" asked one of the boarders.

"It was gay, I tell you!" exclaimed the boy, excitedly. "Couldn't have done it better my-

self, and I've been there. And that boy did have a lively time of it; but he come out all right at the end."

"They allers do," remarked Jenkins. "That's the beauty of them there plays. Everybody allers comes out happy. I only wish real folks did the same thing."

"Anyhow you didn't see much of it," said the boy. "It took you a good while to buy a plug of tobacco."

"Couldn't git back," replied Jenkins, with a laugh. "I went in fur a beer, and run 'cross an old crony, who wouldn't let me go. He stood treat for the whiskies."

"If there was a whisky-bottle I don't wonder you were nailed," exclaimed Foherty. "You're death on the critter."

"I calkerlate ther' ain't no harm fur a feller to whet his whistle, if he don't git soggy," rejoined Jenkins. "Anyhow, I were nailed, that's flat, and lost the play. What was it like, Billy?"

"I ain't going to tell you, as long as you didn't stay to see," retorted Billy, who had no fancy for inventing a play at a minute's warning. It might be possible that some of those present had seen it, and as he was as ignorant as Jenkins of the story, he might put his foot in it by attempting a description.

"No more would I, Billy," broke in the landlady. "He had the whisky, and he wants the play too; that's too much pork for a shillin'."

A general laugh followed this shrewd remark, under cover of which the party broke up, most of them to go to their daily labor, Jenkins for a lounge on the sunny side of Hazey street. He was decidedly a gentleman of leisure.

Billy shouldered his box and set off on his day's business, declaring again that he was going to root out that boy who had seen the carriage, and pump him dry of all he knew about the kidnapping.

He turned as he walked away to look after Jenkins, who was sauntering along in a decidedly indolent fashion.

"You're a deep one, you are," declared the boy, shaking his fist at him. "And I've got a notion that you're on to me somehow. You didn't get up that theater-trip last night for nothing. I wonder if Morton saw me yesterday when they were talking, and put Jenkins on my lay."

This was an idea that occupied his mind for some time as he sauntered onward. It certainly looked as if Jenkins had some reason for suspecting him, and for seeking to throw him off the track.

"And I reckon he thinks he's done it," laughed the boy. "But he ain't, nohow. It ain't him that's on my lay, it's me that's on his. But it was awkward that them bosses threw me last night. If I could only have kept to them, the rest would be easy."

He went on, divided between two opinions, whether he should turn back and watch Jenkins's movements, or go on and see Mr. Weston, whose place of residence the newspapers had revealed.

He concluded to do the latter. Jenkins had finished his work. There was nothing to be gained by following him. Weston was his man now.

He found Mr. Weston's place of residence without difficulty, but failed to find that gentleman in.

"There have been six newspaper reporters after him already this morning," remarked the landlady. "You aren't another? You don't look like one."

"Why, I shine up people's understandings," answered Billy, with a grin, "but not just that way. This is my way." He flung his box round to bring it into sight.

"You're a bootblack!" cried the lady breathlessly. "You aren't the one that saw that kidnapping?"

"I might be able to tell Mr. Weston something about it," rejoined the boy mysteriously. "I know him, anyhow, if I don't know who stole the lady? When will he be back?"

"The good angels know! He's just distracted. I never saw a man in such a taking. He'll go out of his head if Miss Brown isn't found. He walked the floor and the street the live-long night, and he's off without breakfast this morning."

"He's in love with her, maybe you know. Deep: dead gone; why, them two's sweeter than sugar-candy."

"Well, what if he is?"

"I don't know. It's all right, I reckon. Wonder if he's at the office?"

"He may be."

"Then here goes for him."

Flinging his box over his shoulder again, Billy was off like a shot, leaving the landlady looking after him in some surprise, and a little put out that she had not pumped him deeper.

Morton's office was the next point sought by the active and wide-awake boy. He wanted to see Weston badly, and though he was a little afraid of falling into Morton's clutches, it was worth the risk.

No one was present, however, when he entered the office. The door of the inner room was closed. He looked around him, in doubt whether to wait or not. His doubt was resolved by hearing steps in the inner room. There was no time to reach the door, and the intruder shot behind the screen, which had hidden him once before.

The door opened, and Mr. Morton entered from within.

"Nobody here," he muttered. "I thought I heard somebody come in. I fancied it was Weston. Poor devil, if he only knew!"

Billy crouched down at the bottom of the screen. This might be interesting.

"One-half my game's played," continued Morton. "The other half is ready. If he hunts my fair prisoner too closely I'll spring it on him. The letter must come to-day. That will be the last link in my chain of evidence. Then, her lover in prison as a felon, she released by me from captivity to a base kidnapper, she will fall into my hands like an innocent lamb. It cannot fail to work."

He rubbed his hands delightedly, while a laugh of triumph came from his lips.

At that moment the outer door opened again. Morton turned sharply, and an oath came from his lips as he saw who had entered.

"You here!" he hissed. "After all I said!" "I've done my job and I want my cash," retorted the voice of Jenkins.

"Meet me at ten to-night at Will Blake's restaurant. We'll settle there. Leave here instantly! It might spoil all if Weston should come in and see you."

"He can't find out nothin'. The gal's safe in the Thirty-seventh street den. As for the boy as you see'd and posted me on, he don't know nothin'. I played it on him the neatest way, and the little rat never smelt a mouse. The whole job—"

"There, there! not a word more. Leave here instantly. Our track's covered now, and I'm afraid you'll open it. To-night, at Blake's."

He pushed Jenkins out as he spoke and closed the door behind him.

"The infernal fool!" he muttered. "I'll have to teach him a lesson, or he'll ruin my plans yet."

Billy, behind the screen, could scarcely refrain from clapping his hands with delight. In five minutes he had learned more than he might have done in a month by ordinary methods. Jenkins had played it on him, eh? It looked rather as if Jenkins had played it on himself.

After a few more words of discontent, Morton was about returning to his private office, when the outer door again opened. He turned once more.

"Harry!" he cried. "You have seen this terrible report about Miss Brown? Poor fellow, you look distracted! Have you learned nothing?"

"Nothing," came in thrilling tones from Harry Weston's lips. "She is lost—lost—lost!"

He staggered across the room, and fell with a heavy weight on a chair by the table, burying his head in his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCREENED SCOUT.

WE need not repeat in full the conversation that passed between Morton and his victim. The cunning villain expressed the greatest commiseration with Weston in his distress, and the utmost hope that he would succeed in recovering the kidnapped lady.

"But you have been playing a sly game with me, Harry," he said. "It is strange that the newspapers knew that you were engaged to this young lady before I did."

"Perhaps they knew it before I did, also," with a blush. "The newspapers, you know, are very enterprising."

"Well, well; boys will be boys, and girls, girls—to the end of the chapter. But something must be done to overtake this rascally kidnapper. I will help you as far as I am able. But you should employ a detective."

"I have. One of the sharpest in New York. But what can be done? I have no evidence. Where shall I seek? What shall I do?"

He wrung his hands in distress, while his voice was full of pathos.

"Stay here and rest a while. You are worn out," rejoined Morton, with a show of feeling in his tones. "I have an errand out which will occupy perhaps an hour. Remain here till I return."

"But, can you suggest anything, Mr. Morton? I am quite distracted."

"I will think it over, and give you my opinion on my return."

Getting his hat from the inner office, Mr. Morton set out, after another word of encouragement to the distracted lover.

The latter, as soon as his employer had left, again leaned forward with his face on the table and hidden in his hands, while a deep groan showed the depth of his feeling.

"This is too terrible!" he cried. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

He was answered by a hearty slap on the shoulder, and the following words in a youthful voice:

"Cheer up! Hold your level! It isn't all lost that's in danger; and never was."

The distracted man lifted his head hastily, and was surprised to see before him the sparkling eyes and eager face of Billy Turk, the boot-black!

"You!" he cried. "What brings you here? What do you know?"

"Well, it wasn't a pair of mules, nor a two-forty trotter that brung me," rejoined Billy. "Nor I didn't come on a bicycle. About what I know, I know more than all the newspapers and all the detectives in New York."

"About Nelly? About Miss Brown? Do you know anything about her?" exclaimed the lover, starting up eagerly.

"I tell you what, Mr. Weston, you played it cute on old Morton."

"On Morton! What do you mean?"

"Why, didn't I tell you that he was making love to Miss Nelly? And didn't she tell you? I reckon you're sharp enough to put that and that together."

"Morton! Do you mean to say—"

"Mean to say! Why, it's him that's done it, and nobody shorter; and he's just playing it on you fine. There ain't a lamb half as innocent."

"He! By Heaven, if he has done this I'll have his heart's blood!"

"No you won't; nor a handful of his hair neither," declared Billy, resolutely. "You'll have to quit acting the fool and the baby. If you want Miss Nelly back you've got to be a man, and a wide-awake one. If Morton plays sly you play sly too. I oughtn't to have told you anything."

"You can trust me. But, is there anything more? Is this only a suspicion? Have you seen anything?"

"I know that Morton's the kidnapper; I know who done the kidnapping; and I know where they kidnapped her to. The street, that is: I don't know the house, yet."

"Is this true? Are you playing any boyish trick on me?" He caught Billy by both shoulders and looked searchingly into his eyes. The boy bore his gaze without flinching.

"True? Of course it's true! I want to see that detective. You meet me at the City Hall about ten o'clock and take me to him. Then I'll tell you the whole story."

"I will. But hush! Here comes Mr. Morton back already."

"Good-by. He mustn't see me. He'd eat me up without salt if he twigged me here."

The alert boy shot behind the screen, which had served him twice before as a convenient lurking-place.

Billy had hardly vanished before Mr. Morton entered the room, accompanied by a spectacled young man.

"I'm back sooner than I intended, Harry," he said. "I didn't like to detain you, under the circumstances. You may go, if you wish, and spend the day in search."

"I don't care to go at present," replied Weston, thinking of the boy and the danger of his discovery.

"I desire you to go," said Mr. Morton in a decided tone. "It is not right that you should stay here. You may do something. Go, my dear fellow, and continue your search."

Harry was about to object again, when he caught sight of the boy's face, protruded round the corner of the screen, while his hand was eagerly motioning him to go.

He changed his mind at sight of this. The shrewd gamin might have an object, and was certainly well able to take care of himself.

"Why, if you can spare me, Mr. Morton."

"Spare you? Of course I can! Do not return till you feel that you have done your utmost."

"I am obliged to you, sir. Good-day!"

And Harry put on his hat and left the room. Morton stood looking after him for some moments with a peculiarly cynical look upon his face.

"What is your impression of that young man?" he asked of the person who had accompanied him.

"He looks honest and capable."

"I always thought him so," replied Morton. "I fear that I have been too confiding. A rascal sometimes hides under a smooth face. I fully trusted him; yet I received a letter yesterday that makes me think I have been too trusting."

"Ah! I should have trusted his face."

"Read this."

He placed a letter in the hands of his companion.

The latter read it carefully, running it twice over.

"This accuses him of extravagance, and of spending much more than his salary; and suggests that he must have some dishonest way of obtaining money. Do you know the writer?"

"No. Writer and handwriting are alike strange to me."

"Well, sir, what do you propose to do? For what purpose have you asked me to come to your office?"

"You are an expert in bookkeeping?"

"I have some skill in that direction."

"That is why I sent Weston away. I wish you to examine my books, and see if there is anything crooked in them. I will see that he is kept out of the way till you have time to do it."

"Very well, Mr. Morton. That is my business. I shall make as thorough an examination as you desire. I hope they will prove straight."

"I am afraid they won't," answered Morton. "Since receiving this letter I have made some inquiries into Weston's habits, and find them rather questionable. But you are only concerned with the books. I will get them for you. I am sorry for the young man. He has been with me for years. But I must know if I have been robbed."

The concealed scout behind the screen had listened to this conversation with no small degree of interest. A new phase of the plot was opening before him.

But the next instant found him in a decidedly awkward situation. Mr. Morton started round the screen to the fire-proof safe in which his books were kept, and which was set into the wall in that part of the room.

Billy was between two fires. Morton was coming behind the screen. The bookkeeping expert was before it. Discovery seemed inevitable. Not knowing what to do, he crouched to the floor at the foot of the screen, his eyes keenly watching for developments.

Fortunately for him, Mr. Morton did not look in that direction. On the contrary he walked straight to the safe, unlocked it, threw open the door, and thrust his head and the upper part of his body into the opening while reaching for the books.

Now was Billy's opportunity. But if he should dart for the door, the bookkeeper would see him and give the alarm. He did not want Morton to know that he had been watched. The window behind him was lifted. He remembered that it opened on a space between the front and rear buildings. Here was his most promising route of escape.

All this had passed through the boy's mind with the speed of thought, and no sooner had Morton buried his head in the safe than Billy sprung up and darted for the window, out of which he leaped like a squirrel. He caught the sill with his hands, lowered himself to the length of his arms, and dropped into the area below. The fall was only four or five feet.

"What is that?" cried Morton, withdrawing from the safe so hastily as to drop the account-book he held.

"What?" asked the gentleman outside. "I heard a slight noise, but I thought it was you."

"No, I did not move." He looked curiously around him. "Strange! I certainly heard steps."

"So did I. But there is nobody here," said the bookkeeper, coming behind the screen.

"It is queer, then, that we both heard it."

Mr. Morton looked out of the window, but saw nothing suspicious.

"It may have been the wind blowing the window-curtain."

"Possibly."

Mr. Morton got the rest of the books and

closed the safe, still somewhat exercised in his mind about that noise.

He forgot it, however, as he proceeded to show his companion the books, and the manner in which they had been kept.

While this was doing, Turkey Billy, who had been crouched in a corner of the building, rose and looked around him. A door led from the area into the rear rooms. This he made for. It opened to his hand, and he found himself in a passage, which joined the main hall of the building.

Passing between rows of offices, he made his way easily to the street, meeting no one in his course.

The boy walked onward, lost in deep thought. During his half-hour in that office he had gained much valuable information, and put himself on the track of more than one rascally plot. He felt his pocket carefully. The letter which he had put there was safe.

"I don't know what's in this letter. I ain't going to rob the mail. But when I post it, I reckon it's going to do good. I shouldn't wonder if it had in it the key to the whole business."

He walked on toward the City Hall. It was near the hour of his engagement with Mr. Weston.

He suddenly stopped and struck his knee with his closed fist. A look of perplexity came upon his face.

"Jolly, if I haven't gone and done it!" he exclaimed, with a sound between a laugh and a groan. "I've left my box and brushes in Morton's office. Jupiter, but that's awkward! If he finds them, what will he think? I've done it, sure as shooting, and there ain't no taking it over."

He walked on, deeply cogitating. What would Morton think if he should find that box, and connect it with the noise he had heard? Would it put him on his guard?

"Well, there ain't no helping it," said Billy, philosophically. "And there's Mr. Weston waiting. That's the next job, to go and see the detective."

What followed we need not repeat in detail. It will suffice to say that Mr. Weston and his young friend had an interview with the detective, in which Billy told the whole story of his researches, much to the interest of the officer and the surprise and gratitude of Weston.

"By Jove, you're not a bad detective yourself, young man," declared the officer. "This is first-class information. Miss Brown is as good as found. Is there more? Have you told me all?"

"Do you know where Will Blake's restaurant is?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"I want you to go there with me to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

A DOUBLE DISGUISE.

WE must go forward to the hour of ten o'clock in the evening, and to the scene of Will Blake's restaurant. This was not a wholly reputable place of business, though a very active one.

At this hour, however, it was occupied principally by customers at the bar, the eating-tables round the room having few occupants.

Two of these were seated at a table in a sort of alcove somewhat removed from the other tables.

Of these men, who were busily talking in low tones as they leisurely discussed an evening lunch, one presented the ill-favored face and rude smartness in dress of Jerry Jenkins. The other was a black-whiskered, brown-complexioned personage, who wore a slouch hat drawn down well over his eyes and a rough coat with turned-up collar.

Just as the restaurant clock struck ten, two other persons entered the room, to all appearance a farmer and his boy who were in town to see the sights.

The manner in which the red-faced man ordered a snack bespoke his rural habits. The boy was burned as brown as a berry, and walked in a slouching, wide-stepping manner, as if he had been more used to plowed fields than to city pavements.

They seated themselves at a table at a small distance from the two men before described. The latter checked themselves in their conversation, and looked with an air of annoyance at the new-comers.

"Lawsee, but this York's a tiresome place," yawned the farmer. "I'm jest about pegged out wi' the pavements."

"And ain't I tired—gosh!" answered the boy, with a groan.

He spoke with a thick, hoarse utterance.

They continued to talk in a loud tone about the wonders and the weariments of New York, until a waiter brought the food they had ordered.

"My, but I'm proper hungry," declared the boy. "And them looks good."

"Then stop your jabber and stow your jaw!" rejoined the man. "We've got to get outside that provender."

The two men at the neighboring table seemed quickly to decide that they had nothing to fear from these new-comers, and resumed their conversation without further attention to them. The low tones in which they spoke were quite drowned in the blatant talk of the countrymen.

When the latter stopped talking, however, and began to eat in a somewhat ravenous manner, the voices of the others were more apparent, and some of their words reached to the table occupied by the farmers.

"My, that beef's good!" exclaimed the boy, loudly, cutting off a huge slice, which he thrust in his mouth. "They are the ones," he continued, in a very low tone. "The rough one's Jenkins; the other's the black-whiskered chap I told you of."

"Good! It's good and tough; a fellow could sharpen his teeth on it," rejoined the farmer. "You're sure?" his voice fell almost to a whisper.

"Yes."

"There's money passing between them."

"That's the balance of the five hundred. Them's the kidnappers. You ain't goin' to eat all them pertaters!" he continued, in a loud and injured tone.

"Here; you can have the balance," shoving the dish across.

Their conversation during the rest of the meal consisted in similar remarks about the food, while there was no sign that they were paying the slightest attention to their neighbors.

The latter, reassured, continued their conversation with no further attention to the countrified individuals.

"I can't make it out," remarked the black-whiskered person. "There were certainly steps behind the screen, and I found there the box of a bootblack."

"You've got the box?"

"Yes."

"I'll take a squint at it to-morrow. I'll know if it's Billy's box."

"If that young rascal is watching us, and overheard what passed—"

"Blast his eyes! he'll have to be dealt with. I've been watchin' him, and I'm afeard the young rat smells cheese somewhere."

"No open violence, Jenkins?"

"I ain't no fool now, you bet!"

All this had been spoken very low. Only sharp ears could have heard it three yards off. There was nothing to show that the ravenously-eating countrymen had heard a word.

The conversation of the two men now changed to indifferent subjects. After a few minutes more the countrymen rose.

"Reckon I'm full," said the man.

"I kin hold out till mornin'," answered the boy, "if ther' ain't no more grub."

"Then let's pay our shot and git."

They walked to the bar, paid for their meal, and left the room.

Reaching the street, however, they quickly drew under the shelter of a neighboring doorway.

"I'd give something to have been there ten minutes sooner," said the man. "We missed the best of it."

"I don't know about that. You heard what they said about the box, and what Jenkins is going to do if it's Billy's box?"

"He is a dangerous rascal. You must be wide-awake."

"I ain't afeard of him, nary time! But, I'd like to dish him on that box. And I'd like to know who Mr. Black-whiskers is. He's the chap that sent the letter, and that made the bargain for the kidnapping; so it looks as if there was somebody in it besides Morton."

A laugh came from the seeming farmer.

"Come, my boy," he said; "that man has tricked you, sharp as you are. You should have looked closer at his whiskers. And I fancy you didn't notice anything odd about his hands."

"Nothing, except the diamond ring; that was odd for a rough-dressed fellow like him."

"They were whiter than his face."

"They were a good deal whiter the other time I saw him."

"I thought so. The man is in disguise."
 "Ah! I never thought of that. And he is about the size of Morton. Do you think—"
 "I think nothing, my boy. Detectives never think till they have finished seeing. We must track this man. Hush! here they come!"

The two men left the saloon at this moment. They walked together to the corner of the next street, and paused there for a few words. It was not more than six feet from the deep doorway in which the seeming countrymen were lurking.

"You must be on the watch," said the black-whiskered individual. "If anything is suspected there may be some one lurking in Thirty-seventh street. Watch that street from end to end. If you catch sight of Weston or the boy, and if you find them warm on the track, send word at once by messenger-boy to my office. I'll spring the trap on him if I find him hunting me too close."

"Ay, ay! And if I find that the box belongs to that young hound I'll deal with him, now you bet!"

"Be careful."

"Won't I! I've got my wisdom-teeth."

They parted, each going their separate ways.

"His office?" cried the boy. "I bet high it's Morton!"

"Betting won't work. We must be sure," rejoined the detective.

He left his lurking-place and put himself on the track of the man in front, the boy following closely.

Their journey was by Elevated Road, downtown, and ended at length at a high building, which the man in advance entered.

"Morton's office is in there," remarked the boy.

"I thought so. Which room is it?"

"This is the window of the outside office. That one, I reckon, belongs to the inside office."

The detective looked at the building. The windows stood about five feet from the ground. After a minute or two a light shone through the upper half of the inner office window. The lower panes were frosted.

"That is too high for me. Jump on my shoulders, Billy, and look carefully into that window. I must know what is going on inside there.—Hillo! what's become of the boy?"

He looked around him. Billy had disappeared. With a vexed exclamation, the officer continued his observations. A wooden box lay on the pavement in front of the adjoining building. This he hastily obtained, placed it under the lighted window, sprang lightly upon it, and found himself just able to see through the lower edge of the unfrosted panes.

What he saw interested him greatly. The man he had followed was visible, but his whiskers, instead of being on his face, lay on a chair beside him. He was engaged in washing his face, which rapidly lost its brown hue, and left a clear, light-colored visage.

This done, he took off his coat and hat, hung them in a closet, and locked the false whiskers in the drawer of a desk. With a knowing smile on his face, he put on a frock coat and took from the table a silk hat.

At this moment the detective sprang from his perch, and carried the box back to where he had got it.

"I have seen enough," he said, as he sunk into a lurking-place.

He had hardly done so when the man reappeared, now presenting a very different appearance, and walked rapidly away, utterly oblivious of the fact that he was under espionage.

"Now where's that boy?" exclaimed the officer, in a vexed tone.

"Here," cried Billy, suddenly shooting into sight. "And that's him! That's Morton! You can bet your pile on that!"

"But where were you? I wanted you."

"And I wanted this," answered the boy, triumphantly, as he showed his lost box. "And I've got it."

"What do you mean? Were you in there?"

"Wasn't I, though! I was rattin' round in there the worst way. I was bound to have my box."

"You should not have done so."

"Why not? I guess it's mine."

"It may rouse suspicion."

"I reckon it will. I tell you, I left something for Morton that'll make him as mad as a bull after a red rag."

"What was that?"

What Billy told him, however, we will leave to tell itself.

The next morning, about ten o'clock, Jenkins

made his appearance at Morton's office. He was met by that gentleman with a very angry face.

"How is this?" he exclaimed. "Have I not told you—"

"Stow that, Mr. Morton! I told you I was comin' round to take a squint at that box."

"Oh, yes! I forgot. Here it is."

He walked round the screen, stooped down—and an exclamation of rage and perplexity came from his lips.

"What's busted?" cried Jenkins.

"The box is gone, and this is what I find in its place."

He emerged, bearing an envelope-box, on the top of which were drawn some rude outlines with a pen. Looking closer, Jenkins saw that it was the figure of a boy, holding his thumb to his nose and with extended fingers. Coming from the mouth were the words:

"Ain't you climbing up the wrong tree, old chap!"

"What in the world does this mean, Jenkins?"

"It means that the boy's got the innings on you. He's seen your ante and gone one better."

CHAPTER X.

A CRY FROM ABOVE.

WE must gaze for a moment into the prison of Nelly Brown. It is at the instant in which the fair captive, in a state of distraction from grief and fear, tried, as she had tried fifty times before in desperation, the door of the room which served for her prison. To her surprise and joy it yielded to her hand. Her jailer, on the last visit, had neglected to lock it.

Excited beyond measure, the suddenly-freed prisoner hurried from the room into the hall on which it opened. This was a narrow passage, crossing the building to a window which looked out upon the street. Midway it opened into a larger passage which formed the landing at the head of a flight of stairs.

Hardly knowing what she did in her excited state, the distracted woman failed to take the opportunity of escape which the stairs offered, but ran hastily to the window, and looked out upon the street which lay far below.

Few persons were visible, but among them was one the sight of whom sent a great swell of hope and bliss to her heart. It was Harry Weston, who was walking along the street in a dejected attitude.

On seeing him there broke from her lips a cry that rung far up and down the street:

"Harry! help! help! Harry!"

The sad-faced lover stopped as if he had been shot as these well-known accents reached his ears. He looked with eager eyes around him, and up at the fronts of the surrounding houses.

"Help! help! Harry!" came again that thrilling cry for aid.

Then a door opened sharply behind the escaped prisoner. She was seized with a grip of iron and hurried along the passage to the room from which she had escaped, into which she was forcibly thrust. The suddenness of the assault had deprived her of all thought of resistance.

"Stay there!" cried the strong, loud voice of an angry woman. "How you got out I don't know, but you'll not get out again."

The door was closed with a vigorous slam, and the key turned viciously in the lock. The escaped prisoner was once more in her cell. She had failed to take advantage of her opportunity for escape.

Yet her voice had reached the street in one appeal from the imprisoned bird. Harry Weston had heard her wild cry for help, and recognized the voice which had called his name in such piteous accents.

He had been walking disconsolately and hopelessly along Thirty-seventh street, in which he had reason to believe the young woman of his love was imprisoned, when that thrilling cry rung out on the morning air.

His depression was at once at an end. He ran his eyes in eager haste along the front of the row of houses before him, noting every window, in excited expectation of seeing at some of them the beloved face.

This proved in vain. No person was visible. Opposite him was a row of tall houses, much alike in appearance, from some one of which the cry he had heard must have come. From which he could not tell. The sound had seemed to him in the air, and he could not locate it at any fixed point.

He stood and gazed like one distracted, now at one house, now at another. He started across the street, determined to invade the house in front of him, and to try them all in succession.

Who had given that wild cry? Where was she now? All was as still as death. Not a sign of life was visible. Had his imagination deceived him? No, no! it was too real—too earnest. She was—she must be—in one of those houses.

The distracted lover paused on the doorstep of the house to which he had crossed, while a new thought ran through his mind. What warrant had he to search this, or any house? If search was refused, as it very likely would be, could he force his way without authority into the building? Would he not simply put the villains on their guard, so that, while he was seeking the legal right of search, the prisoner might be removed?

He checked himself as this thought came into his mind. It would be safest to get a search-warrant first. He would go see the detective he had engaged, tell him of what had occurred, and return with him at once to the suspected point. An hour would suffice, and it would be an hour well spent.

This resolution was at once put into effect. Carefully noting the number of the house on whose doorstep he stood, he left the spot with a quick and resolute step, his course of action thoroughly determined upon.

There was a very different look upon Weston's face now from that which it had worn ten minutes before. All its weary dejection was gone, and it was full of earnest, hopeful energy.

This change was noted by a man who sat in a lounging attitude on a carriage-block close by, and who looked with an observing gaze into Weston's face as he passed.

"Now shoot me fur a monkey if that ain't queer," drawled this personage. "Five minutes ago he looked as if he was comin' from his grand-dad's funeral; and now you'd think somebody'd jist left him a cool million. He's twigged the crib, sure as shootin', for he was on the step, and he looked as if he was goin' to bounce the den. Where's he goin' now, and what put him on the track, them's what I'd like ter know? And them's what I'm bound to find out."

It was Jerry Jenkins who spoke these words, and who had been on the watch, as agreed upon with Morton the night before.

His watch had led him to an important discovery. Instead of further following Weston, as he had been doing for the last hour, he started hastily for the house which the latter had just left.

Entering this building boldly, Jenkins was lost to view for some ten minutes, when he again appeared in the street with a look of new knowledge upon his face.

"Jupeter! but our cat come mighty near to gettin' outer the bag!" he said, energetically. "So she got to ther winder and yelled fur help, and that chap heerd her! If that fool of a woman that left the door open hadn't been quick as a flash, the game'd all been up. Weston wasn't sure, or he'd dug in and raised Cain. And he ain't giv' it up yet, by no means. He's off after help. That gal's got to be fetched away, or his guns has got to be spiked. I must send word square away to Morton. All I kin do is ter keep on the watch till I git orders from headquarters."

Seeking a place in which he could write a note, the alert reprobate penned a brief description of what had happened, ending with:

"You've got to spring yer trap on him, or slide the gal to a new crib, and that mighty sudden; or all's up. How he nailed the spot so close gits me; but he's done it fur sure."

Sealing this, he addressed it to "Mr. Edward Morton," with street and number, and sought a district messenger station. In ten minutes more a messenger-boy was off downtown with the important note, while Jenkins, satisfied that he had taken the best step he could under the circumstances, returned to his post of observation.

Meanwhile Harry Weston had been making his way to the detective's office in a very different frame of mind from that which he had lately borne.

Reaching the locality, he sought the room of "Mr. Plum, Detective," but to his disappointment found it closed and locked, with a notice on the door stating that the occupant would be absent for two hours.

This threw Harry into a quandary. Should he engage another detective, or await the return of Mr. Plum? Could he afford to wait, that was the question?

After some reflection, he concluded to go to Mr. Morton's office, attend to some slight matters of business there, and then return in search of the detective. If he was still absent then another one must be engaged. Miss Brown must

not be left in detention a minute more than could be avoided.

On his way to get the cars Harry passed the square which Billy Turk made the center point of his business range. There was that young gentleman just putting the finishing touches on a shine.

Pocketing his nickel, he struck across to Mr. Weston with the cry:

"Shine 'em up! Want a shine?—Hello! it's you! And you've had good luck!"

The shrewd youngster had read the meaning of Harry's expression at a glance.

"I think so. I believe I've hit the spot. Be at Mr. Plum's office in an hour or so and I'll tell you all about it. I must go now."

"I'll be there; you bet on that. Plum and I did some neat work last night. We've got our bull by the horns. Tell you all about it when I see you at Plum's. Got no time now— Shine 'em! Shine 'em up! Who wants a shine?"

The boy walked away, calling out his business cry loudly, and leaving Harry amazed by his independence.

Continuing his journey, he at length reached the office of Mr. Morton. He found that gentleman there, in company with a second personage, a slender, spectacled individual, with whom he was in earnest conversation. He ceased instantly on seeing Harry, and gave a sign to the other.

"I did not expect to see you these two days yet," he said to Harry, rather coldly.

"I may be ready for work again to-morrow," rejoined Harry, as he unlocked his desk.

"Why? Have you learned anything?"

"I have concluded to leave the search to the detective. I am not fit for that kind of work."

He had opened his desk, and was looking carefully in one of its drawers. At this moment a messenger-boy entered the office and handed a note to Mr. Morton. This he opened and read hastily, while a marked change of expression came upon his face.

"Ha!" he cried involuntarily, crushing the note in his hand.

He was lost for a moment in thought, and then turned to the boy:

"Can you take a message for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wait a minute then." He seated himself and dashed off a note rapidly, sealed it, and gave it to the boy.

"Make haste," he remarked.

The boy shot away, while Morton turned to Harry, who had evidently obtained what he came for and was closing his desk.

"One moment," he said in a somewhat stern tone. "Read this letter, Mr. Weston, and tell me what it means!" He took a letter from the table and handed it to Harry.

The latter examined it carefully, and then looked up.

"Well!" asked Morton. "How do you explain this? There is no entry of the amount on your books."

"He is mistaken, that is all. The bill is not paid."

"Are you sure of that?" in a very significant tone.

"Not to my knowledge, at any rate. The money did not reach my hands."

"Then how do you explain this—and this?"

He opened the cash-book, which lay on the table, and pointed to certain entries. "What do these mean, Mr. Weston?"

Harry fixed his eyes closely upon the last item pointed out and examined it carefully for some time. Then he raised himself with a puzzled expression on his face.

"I do not know, Mr. Morton. That entry is not in my handwriting. I never made it. Somebody has tampered with these books."

"Yes, I believe that thoroughly. This gentleman has been examining them for the last two days, and they have certainly been tampered with, by—yourself."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Harry indignantly. "Do you dare accuse—"

"I accuse you of improper use of my funds," retorted Morton. "Your books show a deficit of four thousand dollars within the last three months—Heaven knows how much before! No one but yourself has had access to those books, or has handled my money."

"No one!" cried Harry. "Yes; one person."

"Who?"

"Yourself."

At this moment an official-looking personage entered the room.

"You sent for me, Mr. Morton?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"I charge this gentleman, Mr. Weston, my confidential bookkeeper, with robbery, and ask for his arrest. Have you brought the warrant?"

"I have. Mr. Weston, you are my prisoner." The hand of the officer fell heavily on Harry's shoulder.

CHAPTER XI.

BILLY MAKES HIS MARK.

BILLY did not fail to obey orders. He presented himself, as directed by Mr. Weston, at the office of the detective about an hour after the time of their encounter.

Mr. Plum was now present, and listened with a great deal of interest to what the boy had to say. It was but little, indeed. He could only speak of the cheerful and hopeful expression of Mr. Weston, and of his remark that he believed he had found the spot in which the abducted lady was held prisoner.

But this was news of importance, and the detective and his visitor waited with some impatience for the advent of Weston.

In this they were destined to disappointment. An hour passed and he came not. Another half-hour was added to this, and then the detective began to grow uneasy.

"I don't like this," said Plum. "Something must have happened to detain him. A man in his state of mind is not held back by trifles. This must be looked into. You say he probably was bound for Mr. Morton's office on leaving you?"

"That's what I believe."

"A bad move. Morton is shrewd and unscrupulous; Weston confiding and innocent. That man, I fear, has found out Weston's secret and played that robbery trick upon him. He has put him out of the way until he can remove Miss Brown to a new hiding-place. This must be looked into."

"I'll strike out for Morton's and find out," declared the boy.

"Can you?"

"I can try," answered Billy confidently. "I don't often get left when I set out for a job."

"I wish you would, then. I cannot well leave here for an hour yet."

Billy lost no time in putting his design into execution. Just how he was to manage was not very clear. His former relations with Mr. Morton were not of a kind to invite confidence on the part of that gentleman. But the shrewd gamin had confidence in his star, and started on his mission without a doubt of success.

Finally entering the building, he walked boldly into Mr. Morton's office, with as much assurance as if it were his own place of business. The merchant was present, and started up with an oath on seeing his youthful visitor.

"You impudent young rascal!" he cried, "do you dare—"

"Now, don't get excited!" interrupted Billy, waving his hand in token of amity. "It ain't good for the nerves to get in such a flutter. I ain't going to hurt you."

"You young cur! I'll kick you out! What brings you here?"

"If you kick all the curs you run across, I reckon you'll have a busy time of it," answered the boy, coolly. "If I was you, I'd begin by kicking myself first. What brings me here is to see Mr. Weston."

"Take yourself away, then. He isn't here."

"I see he isn't. I'll wait," and the Shine-'em-up Detective coolly helped himself to a chair, and as coolly deposited his bootblack's box upon the table.

Mr. Morton was red as a beet in the face, and seemed on the point of attempting some deed of violence. But on seeing this box he suddenly checked himself, while a look of perplexity came upon his face.

"That box! By Heaven, boy, where did you get that box?"

"Traded off with Jem Jones for an old one and ten cents to boot."

"That box was in my office last night! How did you get it?"

"That's my secret," answered Turkey Billy. "I'm coming out for a sleight-of-hand man, and ain't going to give away any of my tricks."

"You were here yesterday morning, listening, and left that box behind you? Tell me the truth this instant, you young hound, or I'll hand you over to the police."

"I wouldn't, if I was you! It mightn't be healthy. If I was to tell all I know about you, old chap, you'd go to State's Prison a-kinning. So you'd best hold your level! Tell me what you've done with Mr. Weston, and I'll tell you all about the box."

"Mr. Weston! What have you to do with Mr. Weston?"

Despite his presence of mind, Billy's boldness and mysterious threats had brought a shade of pallor to Morton's face.

"I want to have a little chat with that gentleman, that's all."

"I'm afraid you won't get it, then," answered Morton, sourly. "Mr. Weston is in prison as a thief. He has been robbing me these six years, and I have had him arrested and locked up. You can see him ten years from now, after he has served his term at Sing Sing."

"Whew!" cried the boy, as the merchant gazed at him with wicked triumph. "That's kind of rough on Weston! Tell you what, I'll bet you this box I don't have to wait no ten years to see him; and I'll bet you all my brushes that you go to Sing Sing before he does—gobble—gobble—gobble."

"You insolent young hound!" cried Morton, with new rage. "Leave my office this minute, or—" He seized and brandished a heavy cane.

"But I haven't told you about the box yet!"

"Tell me about it, and at once," roared the merchant, his curiosity for the moment getting the better of his anger.

"I left you a little drawing of mine to take its place," rejoined Billy, coolly adjusting his box and walking toward the door. "Only a pen-and-ink sketch. I hope you recognized the likeness."

"You rascal! then it was you? I'll break every bone in your body!" screamed Morton, rushing toward him with the heavy cane trembling in his hand.

It looked for the moment as if the aggravating boy was in serious danger of a cracked skull or broken bones. But the Turkey was equal to the occasion.

"I haven't told you how I got the box yet," he insisted, stopping in the doorway.

"Tell me!" yelled the irate merchant, brandishing the cane over the head of the unmoved boy. "Quick, you rascal, or I'll have you sent to jail for house-breaking and robbery."

"Don't!" rejoined Billy. "It wouldn't be healthy, as I said before. I come in and got my box last night, Mr. Morton, while you were taking off them false whiskers and washing that brown stuff off your face. And, if you want to send me to prison you can always find me round Madison Square. Here's my card."

He flung a blacking-box lid on the floor.

Morton fell back with a very white face at this home-thrust, and the uplifted cane fell from his nerveless grasp, while the gamin with a comical wink, walked with an unconcerned air out of the office. He had decidedly spiked Morton's guns!

Billy gave way to laughter as he walked along the street.

"Wasn't that rich and gay!" he said. "I couldn't help it, nohow! But, maybe I've played the fool. He's scared badly, that's sure, and the minute he comes to he'll be up to some new game. We must get in our work ahead of him. I've got to see Mr. Weston instanter, and find out what he knows."

Obtaining a sheet of paper and an envelope, Billy wrote a few lines to Mr. Plum, telling of what he had learned. This note he gave to a brother bootblack, getting his promise that he would deliver it at once. He then proceeded toward the Tombs, to obtain the desired interview with Mr. Weston.

In this, however, he was doomed to disappointment. Morton had been ahead of him.

CHAPTER XII.

A HOT CHASE.

THE scheming merchant had sent Weston to prison simply to prevent his releasing the abducted woman. He had not intended to spring the trap so soon, but had been forced to it by circumstances. It was now his game to prevent Weston obtaining bail, or communicating what he had learned to any one else until the captive could be removed to another hiding-place. He had therefore sent hasty instructions to the prison warden to admit no boy to Weston's cell, nor to permit such a person to hold communication of any kind with him, for important reasons.

Billy, in consequence, found himself somewhat rudely repulsed, on his application for an interview with the prisoner.

"I'd like to know why," he demanded. "It ain't past hours yet, and I reckon I'm a respectable fellow-citizen."

"You have no order for admittance, and you can't go in. That's enough," was the gate-keeper's surly answer. "Come, make tracks now; I've got no time to waste in talk."

"You ain't, eh? Don't you want a shine, mister? I'll give you a jolly one for half price, and won't charge nothing extra for polish. And it'll take a good deal to polish you up."

"Slide while your skin's whole—you and your polish."

"You'll get a shine, then, Mister Man, free gratis for nothing, for I'm going to take the shine out of you the worst way. I'm going in to see Mr. Weston, and don't you forget it."

He turned and walked away, leaving the gatekeeper wondering what his impudent visitor meant.

What Billy meant was precisely what he had said, and he was the boy to carry it out. He proceeded directly to Mr. Plum's office, and obtained an interview with that gentleman, who had already received his note. He told him in few words what had happened.

"It's Morton that's blocked up the jail ag'in' me, I'll bet a cow on that," declared Billy, after he had completed the story of his late experience. "And I've got a notion I know why."

"What is your notion?"

"Just this: Mr. Weston has found out something, and he's let the cat out of the bag to Morton. In consequence that robbery trap's been sprung, and he's been yanked off to prison, and an order's been given that nobody's to see him. What Morton wants is to stave us off till night, so as he can have a chance to work."

"Well, and what do you propose?"

"For you and me to go to the Tombs together. They can't block you out, and I want that smart coon to see me walk in before his squint eyes."

"Good," cried the detective, with a laugh of amusement. "You're no fool, my boy. And it may be that you've hit the mark. At any rate, it is important to see Mr. Weston at once."

Taking his hat, and exchanging his office coat for a street coat, Mr. Plum led the way, bidding Billy to follow.

Half an hour brought them to the Tombs. Here Mr. Plum met with a very different reception from that lately given to his companion. He was well known, and no objection was made to his entrance.

"But this boy can't go in."

"Why?"

"Orders."

"Whose orders?"

"The prosecutor's, given to the warden."

"Does he control the city prison? What right has he to send such orders? I want this boy. He must go in with me."

"That is a different matter, Mr. Plum. But we don't open our doors to every bootblack."

"Not for a shine, hey?" demanded Billy, thrusting his tongue into his cheek as he passed the gatekeeper. "I told you I was going to take the shine out of you, and I reckon I have."

"Maybe you have, boy; but, don't brag. It won't pay."

Turkey Billy looked up in the face of the sturdy gatekeeper with a change of expression.

"Maybe it won't," he admitted. "It's the dogs that bark and bite both that's worth money. Them that's all bark ain't of much account."

"And the best dogs are them that bite before they bark," rejoined the keeper.

Billy walked on after the detective, thinking over this bit of worldly wisdom.

Every door of the prison opened readily before the "Open Sesame" of the detective, and very soon they were in the cell occupied by Harry Weston.

They found him full of indignation and in a high state of excitement.

"I am here on a villainous charge," he declared hotly to the detective. "Morton has done it. He has tampered with and changed the books; and why? to put me out of his way: to rob me of my betrothed, the infamous scoundrel!"

"This is easily said, Mr. Weston. Can you prove it?"

"That may be difficult," admitted Harry, with a show of dejection. "He has laid his trap well. And I have been too careless and trusting, or I would have discovered long ago that the books were being meddled with."

"You have been too full of love to attend to business, I fear. No careful bookkeeper should have let such a thing escape him. The affair looks awkward, Mr. Weston."

"I fear it does," answered Harry dejectedly.

"But is there any special reason why you have been arrested to-day? Billy here thinks there is."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prisoner, with a

sudden renewal of excitement. "I have discovered where Miss Brown is imprisoned. That is why I am here. The villain somehow knew of it, and had me sent here. My lawyer is out seeking bail. I must get out before night. I fear she may be removed."

"That is why we are here," rejoined the detective calmly. "Leave that matter to me. I am better fitted to deal with it than you. Tell me what you have learned and I will take your place in the work of rescue."

"We will," corrected the Turkey. "I've got a finger in that pie."

"Yes; we will," rejoined Mr. Plum, with a laugh. "Let us have your story, Mr. Weston."

Harry proceeded to describe his adventure of the morning, and to give his reasons for being sure that he had discovered the location of the missing girl. He was not sure of the exact house, it is true, but gave the location of the one which seemed to him most suspicious.

"This is important information, Mr. Weston," said the detective. "I shall act upon it at once. And I have the best of hopes, from what you say, of the speedy release of the kidnapped prisoner."

"And just you keep a stiff upper lip," broke in Billy. "Morton thinks he's got you nailed, but maybe I've got an eye-opener for him. Wait till they bring you up before the judge. I'm going to be there and have something to say then."

That work was necessary was very evident. Four or five hours had passed from the time when Weston had heard the call for help from the Thirty-seventh street window to that in which the detective and the boy left the prison with this information. Morton had had at least two hours to work in since the arrest of his clerk, and an alert villain might have done much in that time.

"We must get to work at once," declared Mr. Plum. "There is no time to be lost. Do you take the Elevated and hurry up to the spot named by Mr. Weston. Keep a sharp lookout there till I come. I must get a search-warrant to prevent trouble."

He hurried away in one direction, Billy in another. Less than half an hour found the alert boy in Thirty-seventh street. As he descended the steps of the Elevated Road a carriage dashed across the street right in front. He looked at it casually, when, what was his surprise to see the well-known face of Jerry Jenkins on the box beside the driver!

To see was to act. In a moment the Shine-em-up Detective was plunging down the street at his utmost speed, in full pursuit of the carriage.

Seeking the sidewalk for better footing, he kept up his pursuit, darting in and out among the promenaders with the agility of an eel. More than one hasty exclamation was made, as the gamin brushed hastily past some quiet walker, but it was all lost on him. That carriage was in his mind, and he had no room for thoughts of anything else.

Just what was in the carriage he had not stopped to think. It was coming from the direction which Mr. Weston had indicated, and Jerry Jenkins was on the box. That was enough for him. He must find out where that carriage was bound. It would be time enough then to learn what it contained.

Billy was a fast runner, and therefore the carriage gained but little on him, though the horses were kept at good speed. Block after block was passed in the flight and pursuit. The pursuer's strength began to flag and he ran now with distress, while the carriage was slowly gaining.

One block, a block and a half, two blocks ahead! And the ardent boy was worn out. It was impossible that he should keep up that pace for a hundred yards more. Earnest and eager as he was, he felt impelled to give up the chase, and dropped suddenly to a walk, utterly broken in wind.

Discouraged and out of spirits, he looked ahead. A sudden hope dawned in his heart. The carriage had stopped also! A street car with a balky horse had jammed the street.

An altercation seemed to be going on, but at length the jam was broken, making a passage for the carriage.

It drove on. But it had gained an extra passenger in the interval! Billy had taken instant advantage of this stoppage, had run up with regained breath, and was now clinging desperately on, his feet on the springs, his hands firmly clutching the rim of the top.

This was no easy position. It needed all his strength to hold on as the rapidly-driven carriage plunged and bounded over the rough sur-

face of the street. But it was to him a matter of life and death, and he set his teeth desperately as he clung on with all the strength in his flesh and bones.

Fully a mile was passed in this difficult position. Then the carriage turned the corner of a street so abruptly that the boy's hold gave way and he was flung violently to the pavement.

He was bruised by the fall, yet in an instant he was up and in pursuit again. He was wearied, sore, nearly worn out, yet with unyielding grit he held on to the pursuit. And progress was now more difficult, as the pavement here was more crowded. They had now reached a much less aristocratic part of the city.

As the carriage swung round a corner into another street a block in advance, a sense of despair came upon the boy's heart. Should he give up? No, not while he could move one foot after another! When he could run no longer he would walk on the track of that carriage. He would win or die in the traces.

He gained the corner of the street into which the carriage had last turned. As he looked quickly down it a sudden gush of hope replaced the despair in his heart. The carriage had drawn up. There it stood, about half a block down the street, while the two men were carrying what seemed a heavy package from it into an adjoining house.

This package was long and slender, and closely swathed in a covering of dark cloth. It was of the shape of, but larger than an ordinary woman, but its extra size might be due to the enveloping cloths. That it was the form of Nelly Brown the youthful pursuer had not a moment's doubt.

Yet he had lost sight of the carriage for a minute or two. Was it possible that this was the same? One of those men looked like Jerry Jenkins, but he could not be sure at that distance. He hurried up, therefore, and made a closer examination. Yes, there could be no doubt; there were the marks and scratches of his muddy shoes on the freshly-painted springs.

Billy, with the instinct of the detective, looked at the number of the carriage, and took it down on a slip of paper, preferring not to trust to his memory.

He then withdrew into a lurking-place and waited developments. Presently the driver came from the house, took a large bundle from the carriage, and returned with it. He quickly reappeared, and mounted the box, but did not drive away. He sat thus, with reins in hand, for five minutes more. Then Jerry Jenkins made his appearance, and entered the carriage, which was instantly driven off.

The young shadower was jubilant. He had done a splendid piece of work. He had no doubt in his mind that the abducted girl had been removed under the influence of some sleeping potion from the Thirty-seventh street house and brought to this new den for imprisonment.

What would Mr. Plum say when he heard of it? This brought the remembrance of the detective to Billy's mind. He had agreed to wait for him at the other den. What would he think?

"Well, let him think what he pleases," said the boy to himself. "I'll soon make him think different, I bet high."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DODGER'S ARTFUL LODGE.

WHAT was next to be done? There was no use to wait there any longer. Nelly Brown was there, and would stay there till wanted. Yet Billy hung round, with a vague fancy that Morton would make his appearance, and a strong desire to satisfy himself that there was no mistake, that it was really Nelly Brown he had seen carried into the house.

A half-hour passed; then a woman left the house and walked down the street. Billy looked at her with a start of surprise. He recognized the form of that old Irish lady at sight. She was a laundrywoman with whom he had long had an acquaintance, and she bore with her a bundle of what probably were soiled clothes.

He followed with a new idea. Her residence was not far distant, and, as she entered, Billy followed her.

"The top of the morning to ye, Mother Cabill," he greeted.

"Why, bless me two eyes, if it isn't the boy Billy!" she ejaculated. "Sure, an' it's glad to see ye I am; fur I thought ye'd quite deserted yer old friends."

"Not quite, Mrs. Cabill. You see I'm here now. I saw you come out of a house up the street, and followed you."

"I wash for many of them big folks, whether ye'd believe it or no, and it's an illigant custom

"I've got. Set down an' I'll have a bit of a chat wid ye over old times."

"Are these the clothes you brought from there?" asked Billy, overturning her basket and rummaging among its contents.

"What in the wurreld are you afther theer? Will you l'ave them duds alone?"

"I like to look at nice clothes," answered the boy, who had already gained his purpose.

He had seen several pieces bearing the initials "E. B." That this stood for "Ellen Brown" he had not the shadow of a doubt.

"Them things belong to a young lady that's there on a visit," explained Mrs. Cahill, "and I've got to have 'em back this blessed evenin', for she's got no change wid her."

"Did you see the lady?"

"She was asl'ape when I got the things. A sw'ate-faced cr'ature she was, too, avick. But tired out and as pale as a whitewashed fence, poor thing!"

"What room was she in, Mrs. Cahill?"

"The third floor back. But what is that to you, Master Impudence?"

"You know I always like to know things," laughed the gamin.

"Faix, and that's a fact. But much as I like to see you, me boy, I wish you'd l'ave me alone for the prisent. I've got to wash and iron these duds and have them back by nine o'clock. And the time's cruel short."

"I'm going. Good-by!" shouted the boy.

"But come back. And soon."

"I'll be back at nine o'clock to-night," he shouted, as he left the door.

"Sure, you're a quare one, Billy," she laughed. "But come when ye will, ye'll be as welcome as the flowers of May."

The successful scout, with an elate heart and a rapid step, rode back to the Thirty-seventh street locality, in hope of meeting with Detective Plum.

But no such person was visible, and no evidence that he had been there. Billy waited outside for nearly an hour, thinking that he might be within, and hoping to see him emerge.

At the end of that time he gave it up, took the Elevated again and proceeded down-town to Mr. Plum's office. It had been a day of many events, and was now growing late. The halls of the building were dusky with the shades of approaching evening as the boy passed along them toward the detective's office.

As he feared, the office was locked and its occupant absent. There was only one thing further he could do. He obtained from the janitor of the building Mr. Plum's home address, to be used in case it should be necessary to seek him that evening.

Billy's next movement was to go home for supper. He had been too busy to eat that day, and hunger was now making itself felt. Jerry Jenkins as usual presided at the table, and with his usual rough attempt at wit. There was nothing to show that he had been engaged in a criminal enterprise that day.

And Billy was more than usually lively and animated. He felt good, for various reasons, one of the chief of which was the surprise he was preparing for the smart Mr. Jenkins. He hoped to take that gentleman down a peg or two very shortly.

Billy was moved by a double impulse when he left the house about seven o'clock that evening. Should he go for Mr. Plum and get his aid to raid the den of the kidnappers? Or should he carry out the plan he had formed to obtain an interview with Nelly Brown?

Boy-like he decided on the latter. He wanted to show all concerned that he knew a thing or two about the art of the detective.

Eight o'clock found him at Mrs. Cahill's residence, much to the surprise of that excellent lady, who had not the smallest expectation of his keeping his word. She had already washed and fire-dried the clothes, and was now busily ironing them.

The boy made the next hour pass merrily with her by his quips and jokes.

"Faix, I'm tired enough to go to bed, instead of bearin' this heavy load to Mrs. Carpenter's the night," she declared, as she finished ironing the last piece, and fell back wearily in her chair.

"I should think so. I'll carry them for you," volunteered Billy.

"Nonsense! You!"

"What's to hinder?" He was already busily engaged in replacing the laundered clothes in the basket. "I'm your boy, you know."

"It'd be a blessing, indade," she uttered, wearily.

"Of course I'll do it! You've done as much for me many a day."

He had completed his work, and lifted the basket on his arm.

"Third floor back?" he queried.

"Yes. But you can l'ave them wid the lady. She'll 'tend to that. And be sure and fetch back the basket."

Billy, however, had no intention to "l'ave them wid the lady," if he could help it. He wanted badly to get into that third floor back.

Fortunately for him, when he boldly entered the house with his basket, no person was in sight. He did not trouble himself to look far, but mounted the stairs without hesitation. He continued up the second flight, still meeting no one.

There before him was the door of that "third floor back." He tried the door. It was locked. But the key stood in the lock outside. Without losing an instant in thought he turned the key, opened the door, and entered.

A young lady was seated disconsolately in a chair by the window.

"Mrs. Cahill sent me up wid the clothes," he remarked, putting on his best brogue.

The lady turned hastily at his accents, looked wildly round, and sprung to her feet with a bound.

"Billy! Billy Turk!" she exclaimed. "Oh, are you come?"

"Whist!" he said, as he gazed into the suddenly hopeful eyes of Nelly Brown. "If you give the alarm you may spoil all. I've found you, and all's right. Keep up your spirits. Morton can't hurt you."

"Morton! Was it he?"

"Hush! there are steps.—Sure, Mrs. Cahill tould me to bring ye the clothes, and here they are."

The door burst open, and a hard-faced woman entered like a storm.

"What brings you here, boy? How dare you—"

"Mother Cahill was clean petered out," explained Billy, as he emptied the basket, "so she sent me wid the clothes."

"Then why didn't you leave them downstairs?"

"Sure, and I would, but I saw nobody, and she tould me the lady was in the third floor back."

"Fool!" cried the woman. "Come, now! Empty your basket and get out!"

"Faix, if I'd thought there was any harm, I'd never have done it," submissively answered the boy, as he picked up his empty basket and made for the stairs, without venturing a look at the fair captive.

CHAPTER XIV.

JUST IN TIME.

We must go on to a time two hours later in the history of that eventful night. They had not been wasted hours. Billy Turk, after returning the basket to Mrs. Cahill, had busied himself on some matters of importance. What these were will be shown later.

His visit had given a new life to the fair prisoner, Nelly Brown. Plunged before in the depths of despair, she had become suddenly inspired with hope, and sat, as the minutes grew into hours, in her contracted prison-room, waiting with nervous but hopeful expectation for the coming of a deliverer. She had the warmest confidence in her boy visitor.

It was approaching the hour of eleven. She still sat by the window looking out into the night. No thought of sleep had come to her. It seemed to her that she must be ready and waiting for the deliverance she earnestly expected.

There came a step in the passage, light and catlike. It was followed by a low tap on the door. She started to her feet, while her eyes burned like stars as she fixed them on the door.

"Come in!" she breathed faintly.

The click of the lock sounded, the door opened, and a form appeared in the passage, in the full light of her lamp.

Nelly fell back with a cry of dismay, clutching her chair with nervous fingers. There, before her burning eyes, stood the hated and distrusted form of Edward Morton!

"Great Heaven! you?" she cried faintly, her lips parted with fright and dismay.

"It is I, Miss Brown," he replied, entering and closing the door. "Do not be frightened. You have naturally been expecting the wretch who has had you abducted and locked up in this miserable den. Fortunately I have penetrated his plots, forced him to acknowledge the place of your imprisonment, and have hastened here to release you from this vile place."

"You!" she repeated, her eyes distended, her heart beating as if it would burst its bonds.

"Yes, I, who have not ceased to love nor to seek for you. I have not slept day nor night since your abduction."

He advanced into the room toward her. She retreated involuntarily to the window.

"I do not believe you!" she cried, with a sudden burst of indignation. "It was you who had me brought here! I feel it! I know it! It is not two hours since the boy—"

"The boy! What boy?" he exclaimed, hastily, the blood flushing his face.

"The boy that— But I will not tell you. I have told too much already."

"You can tell me nothing I do not know already, Miss Brown," he continued, with a smile. Her hasty words had led him to an instant grasp of the situation. "It was only an hour ago since our mutual friend, the little bootblack, told me that you had been removed from your former prison and where you might now be found. That I flew here with all speed need not be told. I would not for a world have lost a minute."

She looked at him in dread and doubt. His voice seemed earnest and sincere. His eyes were full of a warm light. His knowledge of the boy's visit—

"Then who was it brought me here?" she broke out. "What base wretch was it that had me stolen from my home and locked in this prison cell?"

"You need fear him no longer, my dear Miss Brown," he replied, advancing and seeking to take her hand, which she nervously withdrew, still shrinking away from him. "He has met with the reward of his crimes. He is now locked up in a felon's cell to answer the criminal charges of robbery and abduction."

"But who—who—*who*?" she reiterated. "What harm have I done to any one to be treated thus?"

"Who?" he answered, with a show of indignation. "Who was it lured you into the street on that fatal night with a lying note, that he might bring you within reach of his villainous confederates?"

"Whom do you mean?" she exclaimed. "Harry Weston? It is false! It is the basest of lies! Oh, this is too cruel!"

She crouched back against the wall, covering her face with her hands.

"Heaven knows I am sorry enough to have to give you such pain," he answered. "But what under Heaven can I say or do, Miss Brown, but tell what I believe to be true? You have been deceived, that is all. The man has been a concealed villain for years. He has been robbing me, who confided in him. I have just found it out and had him arrested for theft. The villain, thus caught in his crimes, confessed all his evil deeds at once. It was thus I learned that he had been your abductor, and hastened to your release."

She had sunk almost to the floor while listening to these cruel words, sobs breaking from her lips, her face still covered with her hands. But now she sprung up, ran wildly toward him, clutched him by both shoulders, and looked with burning eyes into his face.

"It is a lie! a base, infamous LIE!" she cried. "You dare not repeat it! You dare not look me in the eyes and say such words!"

In this critical moment Edward Morton proved himself a man of nerve. Not a muscle of his face quivered. His eyes retained their sorrowful expression as they gazed into hers.

"I have hurt you too much already, Nelly," he said, gravely. "It has torn my heart to do it; but what could I do? Do not ask me to repeat those cruel words. I am here for your release. Come with me. You shall have one protector if all the world besides deserts you."

She listened to his words as if she had not half heard them, and continued to gaze with hot eyes upon his face.

"It is false! I will not believe it!" she suddenly cried, thrusting him from her with more force than seemed to reside in her delicate fingers. "He loved me, and I returned his love. We were engaged to marry. Why should he have me kidnapped? What had he to gain by that? Your story has a lie on the face of it, Edward Morton."

"My dear Miss Brown, you can have no conception of the mental movements of a man of this kind," he replied, quietly and calmly. "Nor could I have had if he had not confessed all his villainy. Let me tell you what I have learned: He felt himself in a net from which there was no escape except by flight. He wanted you for the companion of his flight, but knew that he could never obtain your consent to this. It was for this he had you abducted. It was part of his plan to appear as your rescuer, hurry you to—"

a train under the plea of taking you out of reach of your enemy, and be off far away with you before you could recover from the excitement of the escape. It was a deeply-laid plot. Fortunately his arrest prevented it. I have his confession, written and signed, which you shall see when you will."

She had fallen back into her chair, and was gazing at him with distended and frightened eyes, in which doubt struggled with belief.

He caught her hand passionately and drew her unresistingly to her feet.

"Little you know of the perils of orphan girls in this great and wicked city," he cried. "We must fly at once. There is no safety for you or me in this building. You are surrounded here with enemies. Put yourself under my protection, dear one. Suffer me to call you mine. It is your only safety. Come with me. I will be your friend, protector and husband in one."

He drew her toward the door. She followed in a dazed manner, as if not half knowing what she did. It seemed as if the wolf had got the lamb in his toils and would entangle her in the net of a marriage before she could recover her calm judgment.

Fortunately for her, others were working in her behalf. As they neared the door it was flung open from outside, and the youthful figure of Billy Turk filled the opening!

"No you don't, Mr. Morton," he said. "I've been listening, and I tell you it was a pretty play, but it won't work. Let go that rascal's hand, Nelly Brown. It's him, the big thief, that brung you here, and not Harry Weston, who is chucked in prison by this big thief jist to keep him out of the way."

Her eyes dilated with hope and fear as she tore her hand from Morton's grasp.

"You did not tell this man that I was here?" she demanded.

"Me? Tell him? Much I did! I reckon he knowed it himself ten times better than I did. Oh, he's a rum scamp, you bet!"

During the minute in which these words were being spoken, Morton's face had turned from red to pale, his eyes blazed with a baleful light, his lips were compressed with irrepressible fury. He sprang upon the boy, who had not time to escape from his clutch, and grasped him by the throat with the deadly force of hatred and revenge.

Billy had only time to give vent to a low whistle, which rung through the house.

"You young cur! you have escaped me twice before; I'll do for you now!" hissed the infuriated wretch, as he compressed the boy's throat with murderous energy.

Nelly ran to his rescue, and strove to tear away those fury-strengthened hands, but in vain. It seemed as if the boy would die in the choking grasp of his assailant.

But, his whistle had taken effect, and rapid steps were now heard rushing toward the room. Two men entered, the foremost being Detective Plum, who sprang to the relief of the boy.

Morton's fingers were clutched like vise-clasps round his throat. One vain effort to loosen them was made by the officer, and then, stepping back, he struck the villain a powerful blow in the throat, that felled him like a log to the floor. His unnerved fingers released the half-strangled boy as he fell.

The second person who had entered sprang with a cry of joy toward the fair captive, and clasped her in his arms.

"Nelly! My darling!" he whispered. "You are saved, you are free at last, thank Heaven!"

It was Harry Weston, who had been released from prison on bail.

"You didn't come much too soon," cried the boy, ruefully rubbing his throat. "A minute more and I'd have been done for; and then what would have become of New York, I'd like to know!"

Morton by this time was rising gloomily and surlily to his feet.

"You are my prisoner, Edward Morton," said the detective, "for the crime of abduction. Your confederate has been taken and has confessed, and your career of crime is at an end."

CHAPTER XV.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

JUSTICE for once had triumphed. The villainous abductor had been caught at the very moment of his anticipated success, and all through the skill and activity of the Shine-'em-up Detective, Turkey Billy.

But, the villain had not yet played his last card. Despairing of obtaining for his wife the woman whom he had risked so much to gain, he was determined that at all events his rival

should not triumph. Over Harry Weston there still hung the dark charge of breach of trust and robbery, and his late employer was determined to hunt him to a felon's cell.

One week after the date of the events just narrated the case of Harry Weston was called at the bar, for preliminary examination.

This case, together with that against his accuser, for abduction, had excited much attention, and there was a considerable audience present in the court, among them nearly all those whom we have met in these pages, with the exception of Jerry Jenkins, who, being unable to obtain bail, was in prison on a charge of aiding in the abduction of Nelly Brown.

There was a look of satirical triumph or Morton's face, as he sat beside his counsel. He had woven his net of evidence strong and wide, and had no fear of his victim escaping its meshes. Revenge seemed yet in his hands.

The case was opened by the plaintiff's lawyer in a short but strong speech, which left the defendant without a virtue upon the earth. He was everything vile, base, deceitful, and treacherous, of which the legal orator could think. Such an instance of ungrateful treachery had never been known before, if one could believe this limb of the law.

Edward Morton was called as the first witness for the prosecution. After the preliminary questions as to name, age, residence, etc., the lawyer remarked to him:

"Will you please, Mr. Morton, tell your story briefly to the court? What do you know concerning the charge against the prisoner at the bar?"

"Henry Weston has been in my employment for the past eight years," he began in a quiet and decided tone. "For three years past he has had full charge of my financial affairs, and has enjoyed my utmost confidence. I had no reason to suspect him of any lack of honesty until a week or two ago, when I received a letter warning me against him, and informing me that he was engaged in speculation, and had been losing much more money than his salary amounted to."

"Is that letter in evidence?" asked the judge.

"It is here, your Honor," replied the lawyer, passing it up to the bench.

The judge ran his eyes over it.

"This writer, Jacob Jones, do you know him?" he asked.

"No, sir. He has not revealed himself. The letter is anonymous."

"Ah! Well, proceed, sir."

"There was but one thing for me to do," continued Morton. "A defalcation could not well be carried out without showing itself on my books. I engaged a skillful accountant, put my books in his hands and bade him make a thorough examination. What he found there, your Honor, he can best state. I need but further remark that I had Mr. Weston arrested on the strength of his report."

"That will do, Mr. Morton; you may step down."

"One moment," broke in Weston's counsel.

"I have some questions to ask you, sir."

The cross-examination, however, brought out nothing of importance. Morton kept firmly to his story, and his evidence continued unshaken.

"William Harvey," the accountant, was next called.

We need not give his evidence in detail. It will suffice to say that it sustained the charges which Mr. Morton had made. He had subjected the account-books of that gentleman to a thorough examination, and had found certain glaring inaccuracies. A final balance showed that six thousand and some odd dollars were missing, which were unaccounted for in the cash entries.

"How far back do these errors or false entries run?" asked Weston's lawyer, after the other attorney had finished his questions.

"About three months."

"You found no error of an earlier date?"

"No, sir. I did not examine closely further back."

"You did not? Why not?"

"Mr. Morton did not consider it necessary."

"Ah! and why?"

"He gave no reasons, sir."

"It was because—" began Morton.

"That will do, Mr. Morton. You are not on the witness-stand now," remarked the justice, severely.

A few more questions and the witness was released. Some minor witnesses were examined, whose evidence was of no importance, and the case for the prosecution closed.

The case for the defense was next opened, the lawyer dwelling strongly on his client's good character and reputation, which he offered to

prove by numerous witnesses. His opening was weak, however, and it was evident that he considered the case shaky. It looked decidedly black for Harry Weston.

This gentleman was first called upon to give his statement of the affair. His strongest point was that the books had been tampered with, that the false entries had been made by other hands than his, and that his employer was his enemy and had been seeking to ruin him. He was going on to state why, when he was checked by the opposite lawyer.

"This evidence cannot be admitted. It has no bearing on the case before the court," he declared, strongly.

"As you please, sir. It is fortunate that the court knows it already," answered Harry, with a home-thrust.

Morton's connection with the abduction was indeed well-known to the court.

"You are a practical and skillful accountant, Mr. Weston, I believe?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"I have had some experience, sir."

"How is it, then, that false entries could be made by other hands in your books and you not discover the fact?"

"I am unable to say," answered Harry, doubtfully. "I must confess that for several months past my mind has been somewhat distracted from my work."

"That is a lame answer, Mr. Weston."

"He fell in love, and she said she'd have him. That's what's the matter," broke in Billy Turk. "And I reckon the judge will say *that's* enough to twist any man's brains."

The roar of laughter that broke out in the court at this exclamation could not be stilled for several minutes.

"And, what's more, judge," cried Billy, as soon as his voice could be heard, "Morton kidnapped his girl and doctored the books while he was hunting her up. Anybody knows that ain't a square deal."

"Silence that dreadful boy!" exclaimed the justice, angrily. "Take him out of court."

"I'm a witness, judge," continued Billy, "and a powerful one, too. You can't do without me."

"Keep still, there! If you interrupt again I will lock you up. Remember."

Billy subsided. This was more than he cared to undergo.

The prosecution next declared that there was no perceptible difference in the handwriting, and called the accountant again to testify to that fact. He was somewhat doubtful, however. He thought so, but could not be sure. The books were placed before the judge, at his request, and the questionable entries pointed out to him.

The next witnesses called by the defense were to prove the good character of the defendant.

"William Turk," was now called.

"I'm glad you've took me off that muzzle, judge," remarked the irrepressible boy, "fer I've been bursting to talk. And I reckon when I'm done you won't want no more witnesses."

"Silence!" again exclaimed the judge.

"What do you know about the case?" asked the lawyer, retaining his gravity with an effort.

"I know Morton's a sneak and that this is a put-up job of the worst sort," began Billy.

"Hush, boy! This is not evidence. Tell what you know. Not what you think."

"Judge," continued Billy, turning to the bench. "It ain't out of order to hand up a letter for you to read, is it? T'other side handed up one, you know."

"Not if it has any bearing on the case."

"Well, I reckon it has! the biggest kind of a bearing," returned Billy, as he thrust his hand into an inner pocket and drew out a much-soiled envelope.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FINISHING SHINE-'EM-UP.

ALL looked on curiously. This was an unexpected mode of procedure. Weston raised his head with hopeful expectation, while a look of nervous doubt came into Morton's eyes.

"This letter has not been opened," remarked the judge.

"No, sir. It was given me to post, and I wasn't going to rob the mail by opening it. But I didn't say *when* I'd post it."

"Then what do you know about its contents?"

"Nothing at all, judge. But I can guess a powerful lot."

"It is addressed to Edward Morton."

"To me!" cried that individual starting up.

"Then I claim it. A sealed letter, addressed to

Turkey Billy.

me, no one, not even a judge upon the bench, has a right to open."

By this time there was an excited feeling in court. Billy had awakened the sleepers with a vengeance.

"It has not passed through the mail," retorted the judge. "No law, therefore, would prevent my opening it as a matter of evidence. However, I will not interfere with your claimed right. Here is the letter. But I demand that it be opened on the spot."

Morton received and opened the letter, himself seemingly as anxious as the rest. His face, however, grew red and white by turns on reading its contents.

"The court demands that that letter be placed in evidence," commanded the judge.

Morton hesitated a moment, and then handed it to his lawyer. His face was flushed as he did so.

"It is another letter informing me of Mr. Weston's extravagance," he said. "Almost a duplicate of the former. I don't know how that boy got possession of it."

"I reckon you don't," retorted Billy. "But I know! And if the judge wants to know I won't mind letting him into it."

"It is important to know who wrote those letters. Can you give us any information on that point?" asked the justice.

"Yes," rejoined Billy.

"Who wrote them, then?"

"Mr. Edward Morton, Esquire!"

This answer took the court utterly by surprise. A flush of hope came into Harry Weston's face. Morton grew red with anger.

"I demand that the court shall protect me against the insolent lies of this vagabond of the streets!" he roared.

"I swore on the Book, Mr. Morton," retorted Billy. "Don't you say I'm a-lying."

"This is an extraordinary assertion," remarked the judge. "Can you prove what you have said?"

"I can, judge. I'll tell you the whole story. I got that letter from Jerry Jenkins, who's in prison now about that kidnapping. He gave it to me to post, but I didn't post it just then. I wasn't in no hurry. And Jerry Jenkins got it from Mr. Morton. I saw him hand it to him."

"Liar!" cried Morton, starting up again. "I was— There was no one—"

He paused in confusion. He had let too much out in his haste.

"No one there? Oh, yes, there was! I was looking through a hole I had made in the wall, and saw you hand it over, and heard you tell him to post it at Harlem. That took me to Harlem the next morning, for I wanted that letter. And I got it," he concluded, in a tone of triumph.

"Are you sure that this is the man you saw hand the letter to Jenkins?"

"I wasn't sure then, for he had on false whiskers, and his face was stained. But I'm sure now, 'cause I saw him, since, the same way— me and Mr. Plum, the detective; and we followed him to his office and saw him take off his whiskers and wash off the paint. And it was Edward Morton, Esquire, that came out! If you want to know any more about it, judge, send for Jerry Jenkins."

There was a most decided change in the state of affairs. The case, which had looked so dark for Harry Weston, had suddenly changed its aspect. That the prisoner was the victim of a conspiracy seemed now evident, and all who knew the story of the abduction felt sure that Edward Morton had done the thing from rivalry in love.

"This is highly important," declared the justice, writing rapidly. "Officer, take this order, and bring the man mentioned into court."

The police officer in attendance took the order and departed. During his absence the Shiner-up Detective was further questioned, and the whole story of how he obtained the letter was elicited. Nor could the sharp cross-examination to which he was subjected shake his evidence. He kept to the letter of what he had said.

Mrs. Malone was next put on the stand, and testified to the visits of a black-whiskered gentleman to Jerry Jenkins, who, only for the whiskers and the dark complexion, was the born image of Edward Morton.

Mr. Plum was the next witness. He testified to seeing this same disguised person pay money to Jerry Jenkins, to having followed him to Edward Morton's office, and seen him through the window take off the whiskers and wash off the stain. The man that emerged from this disguise was Edward Morton.

Morton by this time was in a pitiable state of nervous trembling and bloodless pallor. But when Jenkins was put upon the stand, and, with the hope of saving himself from the reward of his crimes, told the whole story of the villainous plot so far as he was conversant with it, Morton seemed ready to sink into the floor with fear and shame.

"There is no need to pursue this investigation further," declared the judge. "No doubt remains that the accused person at the bar has been made the victim of a criminal conspiracy to ruin him; and it is equally evident to whom this conspiracy is due, and what was his purpose in forming it. Henry Weston is discharged from the custody of the law. His character for honesty and integrity stands untainted. Edward Morton is ordered into custody on the charge of criminal conspiracy, in addition to the charge on which he is already held, that of abduction. The court is dismissed."

It need not be said that the report of this case made a considerable sensation in New York, and that Harry Weston, Nelly Brown, and above all Billy Turk, were the heroes of the hour.

Ere long the trial we have described was followed by another, in which Edward Morton was the accused and Harry Weston and Nelly Brown the accusers, while the witnesses were the same as in the former case.

It will suffice to say that this trial ended in the sentence of Edward Morton to ten years' imprisonment on the two indictments on which he was tried. As for his confederate, Jerry Jenkins, he was let off, in view of his turning State's evidence, with two years at Sing Sing.

It but remains to state that Edward Morton's business was seized upon by his creditors, for fear of a total loss. By order of the court it was put up for sale and purchased by a wealthy friend of Harry Weston, who placed it in charge of the latter, as the person best able to conduct it.

It was to become the property of Harry Weston, he engaging to repay the advance of his friend in a series of easy payments.

On the day he became proprietor of the business in which he had long been a paid employé, another event of interest took place, a marriage between the two lovers whose course of true love had run in so crooked a channel. It was a happy wedding, that led to a very happy married life.

As for Billy Turk, we hate to part with him in a paragraph, but we have told all of his story that we set out to tell. He has long since discarded his box and brushes. Mr. Plum wanted him to take up the business of a detective, for which he seemed so well-fitted, but he preferred to accept the offer of Harry Weston of a place in his business, and now that years have elapsed he occupies the same position Weston formerly held under Edward Morton—that of confidential clerk and man of business. One year from now he is to be admitted as a partner, for Billy Turk has shown the same energy and ability as a merchant's clerk that he formerly showed as a bootblack, and continued to "shine 'em up" in the one as in the other.

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